

Exploring Teacher Candidates' Perception of Practicum Placement Within Concurrent
Teacher Education in Two Ontario Universities

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Abstract

In this study, teacher candidates' perception of their concurrent education program at two Ontario universities were examined, with specific emphasis on how the programs utilized practicum placements, to determine the effectiveness in preparing teacher candidates to teach. This research also strived to uncover the best ways to optimize concurrent teacher education through practicum placements. A questionnaire and interviews were used to uncover teacher candidates' perceptions at one teacher education program that used full integration of practicum and one that used minimal integration of practicum. The findings revealed that teacher candidates were generally more satisfied with the overall program when there was full integration of practicum. There were statistically significant differences found between the two concurrent programs with regard to practicum time and preparedness and context of the practicum and a highly significant difference found for theory-practice divide. There was also a statistically significant difference ($p < .05$) observed between the teacher candidates at each university in terms of their beliefs about the need for improvement of their program. Some of the improvements that participants believed could be made to their respective programs included having (a) exceptional mentor teachers and teacher educators, (b) longer placements with a balance of observation and practicum teaching, (c) clear expectations and evaluations of practicum placement, and (d) more distinct connections between theory and practice made within the programs.

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CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION TO THE STUDY

This study was conducted to describe and analyze the perceptions of teacher candidates to determine their satisfaction with how well their specific concurrent teacher education program utilized practicum placement to prepare them for a career in teaching. In Ontario, prospective teachers obtain certification to teach in the K-12 education system with the successful completion of a Bachelor of Education degree. The process of becoming a teacher within Ontario requires prospective teachers to complete either a consecutive 8-month training program or a concurrent 5-year program at an accredited university. Of the 18 recognized teacher education institutions in Ontario, 10 have concurrent options (Ontario College of Teachers, 2013).

Concurrent education programs differ in both their length and structure from the traditional consecutive model of teacher education. Consecutive teacher education programs often last between 8 and 12 months, and teacher candidates are allowed to enter these programs after they have completed a bachelor degree (Crocker & Dibbon, 2008). Within concurrent education programs, discipline-specific courses are taken concurrently with education-related courses (Crocker & Dibbon, 2008). Along with discipline-specific courses for their primary bachelor degree, teacher candidates are required to complete a variety of tasks, such as class assignments and practicum placements, in order to obtain their Bachelor of Education degree. Concurrent programs often run between 3 and 5 years, depending on the undergraduate program (Van Nuland, 2011).

Baek and Ham (2009) define the teaching practicum as “a course which allows pre-service teachers to play the role of teacher on the basis of theoretical understanding on education, and under present teachers’ coaching, to develop pre-service teachers’

practical competence” (p. 272). Teaching practica often involve observation and practice teaching. Teacher candidates are given a chance to teach in real classrooms, plan lessons, practice assessment and evaluation, develop classroom management techniques, and learn from their assigned mentor teacher. These practica also involve evaluations of teacher candidates by their mentor teachers and/or education faculty. All teacher education programs consist of some form of in-school experience, a requirement in order to be an accredited teacher education program within Ontario (Ontario College of Teachers, 2013). Successful teacher education matters for overall teaching effectiveness and it is the practicum placement that is often cited as the most beneficial experience within teacher education (Darling-Hammond, 2006b; Ingvarson, Beavis, & Kleinhenz, 2007; Tannehill & Goc-Karp, 1992).

Researchers believe that the effects of extended practicum placements needs to be explored more (Clandinin, Downey, & Huber, 2009; Covert & Clifton, 1983; Duquette, 1996). Therefore, it is of interest to explore the structure of concurrent education programs with varying degrees of practicum placement in order to shed light on how concurrent education’s effectiveness can be increased.

A mixed methods approach, using a questionnaire and in-depth interviews with teacher candidates at two universities in Ontario, was utilized to gain an understanding of the influence of practicum placements and the problems associated with the practicum.

By reflecting on my own experiences with concurrent education. it was my hope that I would be able to separate my voice from this research and be as objective as possible in collecting and analyzing the data.

Personal Connection to Concurrent Education

My interest in concurrent teacher education stems from my own experience in the program. Throughout my studies, I questioned the way the program was structured, specifically how the practicum was utilized and how the program compared to traditional consecutive teacher education programs. My experiences in the program provided important context to my research.

Early in my first year of concurrent education, I realized the program did not meet my initial expectations. Theories and history of education were discussed but little connection to the classroom was made. Furthermore, the first year did not offer practicum placements or classroom observations. I wondered when I would be able to test my ability in the classroom.

My second year of concurrent education was an improvement. The program offered a placement in the community through which we could observe teachers working with children. Each concurrent student was assigned a teacher to observe in his or her classroom. Our involvement was limited, however, and most days I prepped lessons or photocopied items. While I enjoyed the opportunity to be in a classroom, I desired a more active role. I still questioned whether I would be a good teacher, and this uncertainty persisted into my final year of the program.

Also in my second year, I enjoyed a course about diversity in education in which we examined diversity issues that arise in the classroom. We watched videos, read articles, and discussed these topics throughout the semester. Looking back, I would have appreciated some teaching experience to draw upon in these discussions. For example, in one of my seminars we were talking about parent-teacher relationships, and I argued that

the lines of communication should be open between the teacher and parent. More specifically, I believed parents should have access to teachers' work email. My teaching assistant responded to this idea by suggesting it would require too much contact between parents and teachers and added that communication should be limited. Although I disagreed, I did not have practical experience to support my argument. Having now experienced both forms of communication, I stand behind my initial belief. These discussions could have been more valuable if we had real teaching experience from which to draw.

In my third year of concurrent education, we had our first Bachelor of Education course, which allowed me to reflect on my feelings about my own educational experiences and become more aware of my views of teachers and education. This year also provided our first introduction to structured lesson planning. The course was very important for setting the foundation for our lesson and unit planning, although I still wanted to put my lessons into practice. As there were no placements this year, I decided to do my own volunteering in classrooms and mentoring students through a charitable organization.

My fourth year consisted of two, very powerful courses focusing on the sciences and assessment and evaluation. Thankfully, that year I had a smaller teaching placement, which allowed me to experiment with a student-centered math lesson in a local school. However, there were no other practicums offered, and I was eager to apply the practical aspects of teaching. Frustration also began to set in as many of my courses were starting to repeat topics. I believed that our time would have been better utilized applying what we had learned in the classroom.

My final year of the program was very similar to a traditional 1-year consecutive teacher education program. In fact, most of our courses were integrated with the consecutive students. I had the same amount of practicum as the consecutive students at the same time. Two of my three teaching blocks were very positive experiences. I was very fortunate to have two exceptional mentor teachers who supported, respected, and helped me throughout my practicum experiences. I did not mind that the concurrent courses were mainly integrated with consecutive students and practicums were the same, but I wondered what the difference was between the two programs largely because we had comparable teaching experience. I questioned why we had not been in the classroom every year of the program. Why did I not have more clarity about being a teacher?

The following questions are what inspired my thesis. I wanted to know how other teacher candidates felt about their program. 1) How do different universities structure their programs? 2) How do teacher candidates perceive their experiences within those programs? 3) How can concurrent teacher education be optimized to better prepare teacher candidates for the classroom? Ultimately, my hope is that this research will help improve concurrent teacher education for future teaching candidates.

Background of the Problem

The practicum is often cited as the most beneficial learning experience within teacher education, no matter how it is designed (Hascher, Cocard, & Moser, 2004; Lortie, 2002). An exhaustive search of the literature was conducted through online databases and print and little research on concurrent education was found. With the small amount of research done on the concurrent teacher education model and how programs utilize the practicum placement, more research needs to be done. The practicum in consecutive

teacher education is often being conducted and evaluated inappropriately because of inadequate assessments (Furness & Gilligan, 2004; Hegender, 2010; Taylor & Miller, 1985, Tillema, Smith, & Leshem, 2011). Baek and Ham (2009) define the practicum as a “course which allows learner to perform a practice under practical expertise’s coaching to develop learner’s practical competence” (p. 272). Within concurrent education, the amount of practicum time varies greatly depending on the institution and individual program level.

Boz and Boz (2006) uncovered that most students experience problems during the practicum. With many students having problems in a variety of different settings, it seemed beneficial to uncover teacher candidates’ perception of what constitutes an effective practicum placement within concurrent education and how concurrent education can be improved to create teachers who are prepared for the inherent demands of the profession. The high number of teachers leaving the profession within 3 years of entering, points to teachers who are unprepared for the challenges of their career (Clandinin et al., 2009; Darling-Hammond, 2006a; Ure, 2010).

Ure (2010) believes that more needs to be done to better prepare teachers for the profession of teaching. This idea of improving teacher education is not a new one. Vick (2006) outlines the history of teacher education after 1900 when teachers were involved in some type of formal training usually including a combination of both course and practicum. Even historically, it was the practicum aspect of teacher training that was believed to be an integral part of teacher education. The common belief that the practicum is the most important aspect of teacher education continues (Ezer, Gilat, & Sagee, 2010). Hascher et al. (2004) found that learning increases were evident at every

stage of the practicum. The practicum allows teacher candidates to be exposed to the full range of a teacher's role (Schulz, 2005). With the high numbers of teachers leaving the profession in the first few years, the optimization of the practicum may be important.

Baek and Ham (2009) also point to the fact that the practicum allows teachers to check their own aptitude for teaching. The more time that teacher candidates can spend with quality practicing teachers, the better prepared they may be for a future role as a classroom teacher. The practicum also allows teacher candidates to be authentic members of the school community, while working with a variety of teaching professionals and experiencing different classrooms and students (Ussher, 2010). The practicum can provide: (a) classroom experience for teacher candidates, (b) opportunity to develop teaching skills, (c) exposure to new teaching methods, (d) a chance to experiment in a safe environment, and (e) the potential for sparking an interest for further study (Hascher et al., 2004).

Statement of the Problem Context

Within Canada, there are over 55 institutions that offer teacher education with varying lengths and program structures (Crocker & Dibbon, 2008). In order to teach in a publicly funded school in Ontario, teachers must be members of the Ontario College of Teachers (OCT). In most cases to become a member of OCT, one must (a) complete a minimum 3-year postsecondary degree from an acceptable postsecondary institution, (b) have successfully completed a 1-year acceptable teacher education program, apply to the OCT for certification, and (c) pay the annual OCT membership and registration fees. In addition to those requirements, the application process includes providing a proof of identity and a Canadian Criminal Record Check Report.

Of the 18 teacher education programs in Ontario that are recognized by OCT, 10 of those institutions have concurrent education options. Within Ontario, there are five areas of study within teacher education: primary/junior level, junior/intermediate level, intermediate/senior level, aboriginal studies, and technological studies. Accreditation by OCT of Ontario teacher education programs surrounding the practicum includes observed practice teaching in schools or other situations within which the Ontario curriculum is used, participation in settings related to each division (e.g., primary and junior for P/J), at least one of the subject areas of the program that is related to the teacher candidate's disciplinary focus, and assessment during the practicum by an experienced teacher supervisor. Within Ontario, the practicum must be at least 40 days in length with the OCT citing that most programs should allot 60 days for practicum placements. The practicum can take different forms with some being full-time placements and others being intermittent. Some programs within Ontario have students going to practicum throughout the school year on a weekly basis while other programs have students in placement for 3- to 4-week blocks at a time. Crocker and Dibbon (2008) explored the ongoing trend of longer placements throughout teacher education programs rather than a concentrated practicum at the end of the program.

In August 2011, the Ontario government announced plans to increase the time teachers spend completing their bachelor of education degree, with specific attention on practical experiences (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2012). The shift planned for 2015 will change traditional programs from two semesters to four semesters and will double the minimum requirements for practicum time from 40 hours to 80 (Köksal, 2013). The website for the Ontario Liberal Party stated that 70% of all future jobs will require

postsecondary training and that it is imperative for teachers in Ontario to receive the best training possible in order to prepare students for the future (Ontario Liberal Party, 2011). John Milloy, Minister of Training, Colleges, and Universities in the Ontario Liberal government said:

Ontario has some of the world's best teachers. But we can't rest on our laurels. To help more of our students succeed in school and take the next step in creating the world's best-educated workforce, we're doubling — and improving — the time teachers spend educating for their careers. (Ontario Liberal Party, 2011, para. 2)

Interestingly, within Canada, Ontario's teacher education program is one of the shortest (Ontario Liberal Party, 2011). Rushowy (2012) reports that the deans of Ontario's faculties of education support the increase. Jane Gaskell (as cited in Rushowy, 2012), a former dean at the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education at the University of Toronto, believes that teacher training cannot be done properly in 1 year. When comparing the practicum placements in teacher education with those in skilled trades, crafts, and other professions, teacher training placements have been deemed "short and comparatively casual" (Lortie, 2002, p. 59). It is unknown what this change will mean for concurrent education within Ontario, but it opens up discourse for how teacher education can be improved.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to understand the most effective practices in concurrent education programs that contribute to the preparation of teacher candidates to teach in Ontario as perceived by teacher candidates within Ontario. This study aimed to

shed light on how concurrent teacher education can help better prepare teacher candidates for the classroom.

A mixed methods approach was used in this research. The initial phase of the research involved the use of a questionnaire to collect data from a sample of current teacher candidates from two Ontario universities who had experienced practicum placements within concurrent education. The second phase of the research employed interviews in order to explore the experiences of some of these teacher candidates more thoroughly. The findings of the research provided insight into the perceptions of teacher candidates and may hopefully be used to assist teacher educators in assessing the effectiveness of their programs and help to promote changes in the structure, time, and context of practicum placements within Ontario faculties of education.

Research Questions

The research questions were framed to better understand how practicum placements could help create effective concurrent teacher education in Ontario. The following questions guided the exploration of the topic in regards to teacher candidate perceptions:

1. How do concurrent students perceive the value of practicum placements in terms of developing their facility to teach?
2. What do concurrent students view as the optimal context for practicum placements within concurrent education?
3. What aspects of the practicum, if any, need improvement?

The first question aimed to uncover teacher candidates' beliefs regarding their own practicum experience within concurrent education and how that had enhanced their

own teaching ability. Because the primary goal of teacher education is to prepare future teachers to be effective educators, this question uncovered how the practicum placement is situated within teacher preparation and what its perceived value was to teacher candidates.

The second question aimed to reveal the beliefs of teacher candidates surrounding the practicum placement in relation to the overall program including when practicum occurs, what is expected within the practicum, and how that practicum fits into the larger experience of teacher education. This question aimed to shed light on how concurrent teacher education programs can use the voice of teacher candidates to improve the structure of the practicum and create programs that best utilize practicum placements.

The third question aimed to uncover what aspects of the practicum placement are not working for teacher candidates and how the practicum experience could be improved. Focusing on both the positive and negative aspects of concurrent teacher education provided valuable insight into what is currently working at the two institutions within which this study took place and what can be done to increase effectiveness of concurrent education programs overall.

Scope and Limitations of the Study

This study included two faculties of education within Ontario, which have varying amounts of time, context, and integration of practicum placements. The first teacher education program was called the *Full Integration of Practicum Program* (FIPP). This concurrent program has teaching blocks in each year of the program, the first one occurring in October of the teacher candidates' first year and has primary, junior, and intermediate level qualifications. This program also offers a concurrent education

program exclusive to Early Childhood Educator (ECE) graduates. This 4-year program is for teacher candidates who have previously completed a 2-year ECE program at a recognized college and upon completion obtain their Bachelor of Arts (BA) in Child and Family Studies and a Bachelor of Education (BEd) at the Primary/Junior level. The second teacher education program was called the *Minimal Integration of Practicum Program* (MIPP), which has teaching blocks in Year 5 and primary, junior, intermediate, and senior level qualifications. Time spent in practicum teaching is listed in Table 1.

This study has limitations that restrict the ability to generalize the findings to all teacher candidates. The participants in this research were selected through distribution of letter of invitation emails by faculty of education offices. Consequently, the participants who chose to engage in this research were likely interested in the topic. As a result, the students who chose to participate may represent strongly negative and/or strongly positive viewpoints of their concurrent teacher education experience.

A further limitation of the study is that both programs are located within Ontario and, therefore, are similar in their context. Although the programs were chosen from different locations within Ontario, the insights from this study may only provide one snapshot of teacher education within the province and country and will, therefore, not be generalizable to other contexts.

As well, it is important to remember that each teacher candidate brings his/her own experiences and perspectives into the teacher education program. Each person will have had unique experiences within their practicum placements due to their mentor, teacher educator, and practicum school. While this provided a rich variety of experiences, it is important to remember these experiences are all different and distinct.

Table 1

Practicum Amounts: Time Spent Teaching in Each Program

	Full Integration of Practicum Program (FIPP)	Minimal Integration of Practicum Program (MIPP)
Year 1	2 weeks	None
Year 2	2 weeks	None- observation only
Year 3	2 weeks	None- observation only
Year 4	3 weeks	None- observation only
Year 5	13 weeks	11 to 12 weeks

There are also limitations based on the amount of time that was available for this research and the number of people who participated. This research was conducted over the course of 6 months and, as such, only allowed for data collection at one point in time. Time also affected the way that interviews were conducted. Due to the availability of both participants and the researcher, focus groups proved too difficult to manage and only one focus group was conducted. The subsequent interviews were individual. This would be a limitation because one interview was conducted with two people who may have responded differently had it been an individual interview.

There is also the possibility that participants did not answer truthfully. Teacher candidates completed the survey electronically, which might have made it easier to answer dishonestly.

Outline of the Remainder of the Document

The remaining chapters within this document provide a foundation for understanding the area of study, the research itself, and the implications of the findings from the research. Specifically, the remaining chapters are as follows: Review of Related Literature, Methodology, Presentation of Results, and Summary, Discussion, and Implications.

Chapter Two presents a literature review that synthesizes related and pertinent literature and, therefore, provides additional knowledge and understanding of the issue under investigation. It uncovered many important themes within teacher education that provided insight into what makes effective teacher education.

Chapter Three outlines the research methodology and instrumentation that was used to collect and analyze data for this study. In addition, this section discussed the

assumptions, credibility issues, and ethical considerations that are necessary to advance valid and reliable findings. This chapter concludes with a restatement of the purpose of the study.

Chapter Four presents the findings of this study. The research findings are reported by themes found in both the phases of the research.

To finish, Chapter Five begins with a brief summary of this research study. It continues with a discussion of the research findings as they relate to the themes found. The implications of the results and recommendations for further research are also presented within this chapter.

CHAPTER TWO: REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

This chapter provides information on the implications of practicum on teacher education. There appears to be a large gap in research on concurrent teacher education and, thus, most of the information given in this chapter will relate to research on consecutive teacher education. It is hoped that the research presented in this chapter on consecutive teacher may be extrapolated to concurrent education. While there are differences between the concurrent and consecutive models of teacher education, important themes related to teacher education, as a whole, may be uncovered through an examination of research studies on consecutive teacher education. This chapter focuses on the themes of (a) theory-practice divide, (b) time and preparedness, (c) mentor teachers, (d) reflective practice, (e) the connection between the university and district school boards and (f) context of the practicum. The ideas within each theme are linked to the research that is current and most often cited by other researchers.

Theory-Practice Divide

The theme that arose most during the review of the literature was the ongoing issue of the theory-practice divide. Many authors cite the theory-practice divide as one of the greatest problems within teacher education (Darling-Hammond, 2000; Darling-Hammond, 2006a; Duquette, 1996; Korthagen, 2010; Schulz, 2005; Taylor & Miller, 1985; Ure, 2010; Van Nuland, 2011). Although teacher education is a professional degree program, the experience that is provided to teacher candidates in the program does not mirror the experience they might have in the world of teaching (Hattingh & de Kock, 2008). Clandinin et al. (2009) believe that most teacher education programs are out of touch with what education is really like, showing the divide between what is being taught

in teacher education programs and what the profession of teaching is like. It is difficult for teacher candidates to navigate the world of academia, where theory and hypothetical situations are discussed, versus the “real world,” where teachers are faced with limited resources, time constraints, and external pressures (Korthagen, 2010). Vick (2006) indicates that one of the largest problems within teacher education programs is lack of emphasis on real classroom situations.

Ure (2010) believes that teacher candidates are bombarded with information and are confused about what information is most relevant to classroom situations; this may include such concepts as knowledge of learning, student development, assessment, and classroom management. With teacher candidates overwhelmed with information, it may be difficult for them to uncover the meaningful connections to practice and what will help them become effective teachers. In their study, Stepan, McClurg, and Beiswenger (1995) found that many teacher candidates do not make the connection between what they learned in a teacher education program and what is needed in the classroom. If this is the case, then why educate teachers at all?

Even teacher educators, those who educate teacher candidates, are uncomfortable with the perceived disconnect between teacher education and the reality of the profession (Hall & Schulz, 2003). One source of discomfort comes from the fact that teacher education often fails to help teacher candidates make the connection between what is learned in university and what is learned in schools (Stepan et al., 1995). Darling-Hammond (2006b) points out that many university teacher educators are lecturing about teaching strategies that they have not used themselves and “[s]tudents’ courses on subject matter topics [are] disconnected from courses on teaching methods, which in turn [are]

disconnected from courses on foundations and psychology” (p. 152). This lack of connection is manifested through disjointed ideas and subjects and teachers educators who are “experts” in specific fields with no links between fields (Korthagen, 2010). Hall and Schulz (2003) describe the current context of teacher education in the following way: “While teacher educators may try to develop in their students a capacity for change, risk and inquiry, these are not the capacities that schools nurture” (pp. 379–380). Although it seems that teacher educators aim to impart practices that are based on research and theory, if schools are not supportive of these ideals, then the teacher education program might be unsuccessful in preparing teacher candidates for the real world.

Ure (2010) suggests that a connection needs to be made between practical experience and academic content. In their study, Covert and Clifton (1983) found that integration of the practicum with academic work is responsible for improved attitudes and self-concepts among teacher candidates. The need for connection between theory and practice is only heightened by the potential benefits. Darling-Hammond (2006a) argues:

the most powerful programs require students to spend extensive time in the field throughout the entire program, examining and applying the concepts and strategies they are simultaneously learning about in their courses alongside teachers who can show them how to teach in ways that are responsive to learners. (p. 307)

Many researchers believe that the way to connect theory and practice is to better utilize the practicum placement. For example, Korthagen (2010) provides three guidelines for teacher education to help decrease the theory-practice divide. The first guideline is to create appropriate learning experiences for teacher candidates. This relates

to the theory-practice divide by allowing teacher candidates more time in practicum placements and the opportunity to choose schools that are suitable for their practicum placements. The second guideline proposed by Korthagen is to encourage reflective practice, which will help connect practicum experiences with coursework. The third guideline is to provide theoretical notions for empirical research. Allowing teacher candidates to be aware of theory and reflect on their experiences in relation to theory may help to create a more meaningful practicum and overall teacher education experience.

Ure (2010) also suggests some ways to mitigate against the theory-practice divide. Ure's first suggestion is to provide both professional and practical knowledge to teacher candidates and let them engage in both ways of thinking. Ure also contends that teacher education include teacher candidate development as part of teacher development. This development includes processes where teacher candidates are only expected to take on whole-class teaching at the advice of their mentor teacher when they are ready, allowing development to occur at the individual pace of the teacher candidate. Ure holds the belief that teacher education programs should develop a value in evidence and research-based teaching and learning, thereby allowing teacher candidates to understand the value in both theory and practice. Finally, Ure suggests that teacher education programs should educate teacher candidates about the professional standards of teaching, thereby encouraging them to become aware of their roles as both a professional and a teacher candidate.

Darling-Hammond (2006a) believes that there are better connections between theory and practice when coursework and fieldwork are taken concurrently with extensive and intensely supervised practica that link theory and practice. The 5-year

model of teacher education, that she espouses, is thought to be more effective, by allowing teacher candidates to devote more time to learning to teach, with the coursework and the practicum connected (Darling-Hammond, 2000). When the practicum is extended and better connected with coursework, the result may be a more efficient program with more satisfied, effective, and prepared teachers who are more likely to stay in the teaching profession (Darling-Hammond, 2000).

Time and Preparedness

Central to the topic of concurrent education is the length of program. Time often appears in the literature as a factor related to effective teacher education and the existence of insufficient time for teacher education and practicum placements has been identified. Within Canada, teacher education program structure varies in duration between 8 months to 5 years (Van Nuland, 2011). Although concurrent programs allow teacher candidates to complete an undergraduate degree and a Bachelor of Education alongside each other, the amount of time spent in the classroom is not necessarily sufficiently increased when compared to consecutive models (Crocker & Dibbon, 2008). Therefore, it is important to look at not only the length of the program, but also at the time teacher candidates spend in their practicum placements.

Ure (2010) argues that improvements can be made to teacher education programs by increasing the amount of time teacher candidates spend in practicum placements. Darling-Hammond (2000) believes that the length of a traditional teacher education is inadequate and an extended practicum may help in making teacher education more effective. Concurrent education allows teacher candidates more possible years available

to be in schools and the opportunity to connect coursework with experience in the classroom.

In their research, Hattingh and de Kock (2008) found that teacher candidates' perceptions of teacher roles shifted drastically after the practicum placement. Before the program, teacher candidates' perceptions included the multiple roles that teachers play; that is, content expert, nurturer, facilitator of learning, and a friend to their learners (Hattingh & de Kock, 2008). After the program, teacher candidates thought of a teacher's role as a disciplinarian, role model, knowledge provider, and some new roles that were not evident before the program, such as assessor, administrator, challenger, and "edutainer" (Hattingh & de Kock, 2008). It is important to note that teacher candidates come into teacher education with many preconceived notions about teaching and education because they have experienced school for many years (Korthagen, 2010). Lorite (2002) writes about teacher candidates often having 16 years of contact with educators and that provides a unique experience which he describes as apprenticeship as observation. Although this experience is very valuable and can have a profound impact on teacher candidates, it is also important to note that it is limited by the teacher candidates' point of view. Hattingh and de Kock report that teacher education programs are powerful in their ability to shift perceptions about teachers and education, showing the importance of ample time to allow for these changes to occur.

It is vital to allow student teachers to have ample experience in the classroom because it is the way to shift their understanding of the professional role of teacher in a meaningful way that cannot be attained through coursework (Hattingh & de Kock, 2008). Darling-Hammond (2000) thinks that 5-year models can be more effective if they devote

time to learning to teach. This means more time in the classroom, experiencing the role of the teacher, and gradually taking on increasing teaching responsibility. It is also important to allow coursework and practicum experience to link (Darling-Hammond, 2000). This link helps to close the theory-practice divide, which Darling Hammond (2006a) believes can be done through taking coursework and field work concurrently, with extended time in the practicum experience.

Time is also vital within teacher education because extended experience in the classroom allows teacher candidates to reflect on their preconceived notions about education and shift their understanding (Korthagen, 2010). In order to be effective educators, teacher candidates need time to gain knowledge of students and deeper understandings of classroom activities (Ure, 2010). Increasing the time that teacher candidates have in the classroom may also produce more satisfied, effective, and prepared teachers (Darling-Hammond, 2006a).

Central to the issue of time is the idea of teacher preparedness. The aim of teacher education is to prepare teacher candidates to become successful teachers in the future, and more needs to be done to better prepare teachers for the demands of the profession (Ure, 2010). Throughout the literature, the theme of preparedness continually arises, as teacher candidates leave teacher education programs feeling as though they are not prepared to tackle the role of educator (Korthagen, 2010).

Aypay (2009) notes the important connection between the feeling of preparedness and the likelihood of becoming an effective teacher. Darling-Hammond (2006b) states that “[f]or all the evidence that teachers benefit from learning about their craft, it is also true that many teachers feel unprepared for the real challenges that face in their work” (p.

34). Clandinin et al. (2009), Darling-Hammond (2006a), and Ure (2010) all note the large number of teachers leaving the profession within the first 5 years of entering it, pointing to a high percentage of teacher candidates who are unprepared for the role of teacher. Teacher education “need[s] to develop new ways of teaching and assessing a student’s practical skills to protect people and to facilitate change and, thus, to ensure a student’s readiness for practice” (Furness & Gilligan, 2004, p. 466). Darling-Hammond (2000) points to the fact that the more prepared teachers are, the more confident and successful they are with students. She also believes that a 5-year model of teacher education allows teacher candidates to spend more time learning to teach, thereby creating more satisfied and effective teachers who want to stay in the profession (Darling-Hammond, 2000).

Darling-Hammond and Bransford (2007) believe that multiple short placements are not ideal and that longer placements, where connections with the school community may be made, are more beneficial. This extended time in classrooms allows teacher candidates to experience the school community, become contributing members within the school, and work with different people within the school community.

Darling-Hammond (2006b) believes that the traditional placements that last about 12 weeks are not enough and she recommends practica that are at least 30 weeks in total. Darling-Hammond (2006a) also believes that the development of practicum experiences should follow two guidelines. The first guideline is that practica should provide a clear vision of good teaching with well-defined standards, including how to evaluate the practicum. This means that teacher educators and mentor teachers must be aware of specific expectations for teacher candidates throughout their practicum experience.

Second, Darling-Hammond (2006a) recommends extended clinical experience with teaching experience in each program that connects with coursework.

Mentor Teacher

Within the context of the practicum placement, the mentor teacher is often thought to be one of the most influential individuals in teacher preparation (Lortie, 2002; Tannehill & Goc-Karp, 1992). For this research, the term mentor teacher is synonymous with associate teacher. Mentor teachers are the supervising teachers within the practicum whose duties can include and are not limited to modeling teaching, providing feedback, and evaluating the practicum. Supervisors run the practicum but most of the responsibility falls on the mentor, and, in turn, the mentor teacher often determines the learning context for his or her teacher candidate (Hascher et al., 2004).

Teacher candidates often find themselves in between roles as they learn to become teachers while still being students within teacher education programs; teacher candidates are still under the influence of their mentor teachers, and where teacher candidates are placed often boils down to willingness and availability of local school boards (Martinovic & Dlamini, 2009). In their study, Ezer et al. (2010) found that when teacher candidates rate the agents of training based on influence, the mentor teacher was the most significant; in second place was the teacher educator. Reviewing research on successful models can also help shed light on how teacher education programs can improve their structure.

Stepans et al. (1995) discussed the success of the Wyoming model of teacher education and cited the importance of choosing effective mentor teachers who support and reflect the goals of the program. The Wyoming model is an effective research-based

teacher education program that includes experts, such as teacher educators, in the field, collaboration with mentor teachers, research-based teaching strategies, extensive modeling, and interactive seminars.

In addition to the relationship between the mentor teacher and the teacher candidate, the teacher educator is another influence within the practicum placement (Hutchinson, 2011). Clandinin et al. (2009) believe that teacher educators need to encourage mentor teachers to help create an optimal learning experience and work hard with teacher candidates. The impact of the mentor teacher is evident in Boz and Boz's (2006) study on practicum placements where the small number of teacher candidates who had positive experiences credited good mentors who modeled effective teaching. Hascher et al. (2004) also reported that the teacher candidates within their study indicated that their learning mostly came from their mentor's feedback. Many beginning teachers also think back to their practica and reflect on how their mentor would handle difficult situations, showing the profound impact mentor teachers can have (Duquette, 1996).

Research (e.g., Ingvarson et al., 2007; Nguyen, 2009) has reported that teacher candidates are often paired with poor mentor teachers who can potentially have a lasting negative impact on their future teaching practice. Nguyen points out the important fact that when poor teachers become mentors, their mentees witness ineffective teaching methods.

Darling-Hammond (2006a) believes that teacher candidates should learn from experts. As she states,

the most powerful programs require students to spend extensive time in the field throughout the entire program, examining and applying the concepts and

strategies they are simultaneously learning about in their courses alongside teachers who can show them how to teach in ways that are responsive to learners. (p. 307)

Although some researchers believe that selecting mentors should be based only on their expertise, Tannehill and Goc-Karp (1992) think that this practice may be problematic. They suggest that the best mentor teachers are more than just great teachers; they are great communicators and understand how to optimize the practicum experience.

In order to ensure quality mentors, Schulz (2005) indicates that the role of the mentor teacher should shift to one that brings vision and insight and works with the others involved. Darling-Hammond (2006b) explains why it is so important for teacher candidates to experience great mentors, when she says that “it is impossible for novices to learn to teach well by imagining what good teaching might look like, or by positing the opposite” (p. 153) of what teacher candidates have seen.

Darling-Hammond and Bransford (2007) describe the ideal placement mentor. These mentors model effective teaching for their teacher candidate, thus being excellent teachers to begin with. These mentors also co-plan, allowing teacher candidates a chance to work with them on creating engaging lesson plans. Through co-planning, the power is shifted and both the mentor teacher and the teacher candidate can make meaningful contributions to their students’ education. Mentor teachers should also give frequent feedback. Throughout the placement, a dialogue with the teacher candidate should continue. Mentor teachers should also provide opportunities for practice, allowing teacher candidates the opportunity to gradually take on more teaching responsibilities. Mentors should also model reflection upon practice. The support of a mentor teacher is vital

because it helps teacher candidates to make sense of their experiences, through support and scaffolding (Darling-Hammond & Bransford, 2007).

Reflective Practice

Reflection is a vital aspect of teacher education that allows individuals to think more deeply about their experiences. Chamoso, Cáceres, and Azcárate (2012) believe that reflection helps educators to make sense of their teaching. The idea of reflective practice has been used since the 1980s (Chamoso et al., 2012), when teachers have been encouraged to reflect on their teaching and how they can improve their practice. If teachers are encouraged to be reflective practitioners, this should be mirrored in teacher education.

Beauchamp and Thomas (2009) suggest that teacher candidates should learn to reflect on themselves as teachers within the context of schools. The idea of teacher candidates reflecting within the school context means reflection during practicum placements. While in practicum placements and in a safe and supported environment, teachers can begin to reflect on their teaching to start becoming a reflective practitioner. Schulz (2005) believes that “teacher educators need to prepare teachers not as followers, drawn along, but as leaders, as professionals who are thoughtful, reflective, inquiring, self-directed, and active participants in goal setting and decision making” (p. 149). Schulz also believes that teacher education should help teacher candidates become effective educators by teaching them the valuable skill of reflection. Reflection is central in successful teacher education programs such as the Wyoming model (Stepans et al., 1995).

At the heart of the Wyoming model, teaching strategies are modeled in content courses and are followed up by seminars that allow teacher candidates to discuss the methods and reflect on them (Stepans et al., 1995). This model provides room for teacher candidates to reflect with their peers and teacher educators, and this reflection can allow meaningful connections to be made within the teacher education between theory and practice. Reflection will not only increase the effectiveness of the practicum placement but it will also help create a better connected teacher education program (Darling-Hammond & Bransford, 2007; Hascher et al., 2004).

Promoting reflection is thought to be the ideal within the practicum (Darling-Hammond & Bransford, 2007; Korthagen, 2010; Ure, 2010). Allowing space for reflection in teacher education, and more specifically, within the practicum placement, should allow teacher candidates an opportunity to internalize the process of reflection and carry that skill into their teaching career.

University and District School Board Connection

Many authors (e.g., Chambers, 2009; Giroux, 2006; Siemens & Matheos, 2010) indicate the need to connect university with the community. Linking the university with its community allows for a better-rounded education and helps to connect the academy with the world outside the institution. One of the most important facets of practicum placement within teacher education is the university's connection with local schools (Vick, 2006). Hutchinson (2011) asks the following important questions: Is the partnership between universities and school a partnership of equals? Is the school a place for teacher candidate learning and to what extent does it do so? These are important

questions that need to be answered if universities and schools are to work together effectively in the preparation of future teachers.

Korthagen (2010) believes that in order to connect theory and practice, there needs to be a stronger link between universities and schools, where the university is no longer viewed exclusively as the place to gain knowledge and school is no longer viewed solely as the place to impart that knowledge. Allowing teacher education to become less theoretical, more accessible, and more relevant will require closer bonds between schools, with practicum placements at the heart of the program (Vick, 2006).

Darling-Hammond (2006b) explains that effective teacher education requires a strong relationship, common knowledge, and shared beliefs between school teachers and university-based faculty. In many of the exceptional programs that Darling-Hammond (2006b) outlines in her book, *Powerful Teacher Education*, the university and school staff co-plan the teacher education programs together and work collaboratively on school reform. These strong connections between university and school can potentially create a relationship that is mutually beneficial. Allowing for a more seamless transition between university and school should help keep teacher education programs current.

Hascher et al. (2004) think the benefits of the practicum rest in the connection between university and school because of the profound impact this relationship can potentially have. Closer bonds with schools could mean better selection of quality mentor teachers, selection of schools with better in-school communities, and the development of better relationships between teacher educators and mentor teachers. In traditional teacher education programs, where teacher candidates are placed often boils down to willingness to participate and availability of teachers within local school boards (Martinovic &

Dlamini, 2009). With the value of practicum placements known, these experiences should be maximized in order to provide the richest learning experience for teacher candidates.

Darling-Hammond (2006b) believes that in order to understand the complexities of teaching, teacher education needs to move further away from the university towards schools with a transformative program. Beyond placements with quality mentor teachers, Darling-Hammond (2006b) thinks that teacher candidates should be in schools where teachers are constantly changing and evolving their practice to best suit the learner. The importance of connecting universities with schools is evident. The rich learning experiences obtained through practicum placements can only be improved through increased connection between university and school.

The Context of the Practicum

The structure of the practicum placement greatly affects the experience that teacher candidates have. Darling-Hammond (2006a) wrote that “[n]o amount of coursework can, by itself, counteract the powerful experiential lessons that shape what teachers actually do” (p. 308). Since it is known how important the practicum is within teacher education, many researchers discuss the need to optimize practicum placements through the organization of the practicum.

Tannehill and Goc-Karp (1992) said that researchers must look at how the practicum is organized and implemented. With research showing that many teacher candidates experience problems within their practicum placements (Boz & Boz, 2006), it is important to understand how to best facilitate learning within the practicum. Crocker and Dibbon (2008) note that the structure of the practicum varies greatly between universities; for example, the amount of time spent in practicum placements, expectations

and selection of mentor teachers, curriculum and expectations, and required teaching time. But it is important to ask how learning should be best facilitated (Siemens & Matheos, 2010). Many researchers believe that the largest piece to the puzzle lies within the practicum (Beauchamp & Thomas, 2009; Darling-Hammond, 2000; Darling-Hammond, 2006b; Darling-Hammond, 2007; Tannehill & Goc-Karp 1992; Ussher, 2010). Allowing teacher candidates to engage in moral and social issues is difficult unless it is authentic (Hall & Schulz, 2003), showing the importance of having teacher candidates working in the schools and experiencing real classrooms with real issues. Beauchamp and Thomas (2009) believe that school-based programs where teacher candidates reflect on themselves within the context of school are the answer to more successful practicum placements.

There are many ideas about what the practicum should look like. Hascher et al. (2004) believe that the practicum can take many forms and the benefits vary depending on feedback, reflection, conditions of the experience, the experience with the teachers and students, and the connection between the university and the school. What Hascher et al.'s ideal teacher education program would actually look like is not specifically stated in their article.

Hattingh and de Kock (2008) think that the process of teacher preparation is not linear; instead, it is a "holistic experience of a chaotic onslaught on existing social structures, personal and group identities, personal belief systems, knowledge and competences" (p. 322). Ure's (2010) review of the literature on teacher education points to the following ideal program characteristics: (a) deep conversations about teaching, (b) professionally constructed learning experiences, and (c) nonjudgmental feedback that is

focused on the use of evidence for teaching. In addition, Ure writes about the importance of a purpose for teacher education, a professionally constructed pedagogy that allows teacher candidates to experience the cognitive process of a professional, teacher candidate development, the use of research in teaching and learning, and the integration of the professional standards for teaching.

Boz and Boz (2006) believe that teacher candidates need to discuss their observations not only with their mentors, but also with teacher educators and other teacher candidates. Boz and Boz also suggest (a) allowing teacher candidates to view a variety of classrooms, (b) placing teacher candidates in innovative placements, (c) linking theory to issues and concerns relating to practicum, (d) having good approachable mentors, (e) having teacher candidates respected as teachers, (f) having programs with clear expectations, and (g) providing constructive feedback. Darling-Hammond (2006b) believes that there is better understanding when coursework and fieldwork are taken concurrently. Darling-Hammond (2000) also suggests that the practicum be extended and connected with coursework in order to create more effective practicum placements.

Furness and Gilligan (2004) discuss the simple idea of providing practice activities that promote learning opportunities while allowing teacher candidates to transfer and apply their learning in the practicum placement. An interesting article by Sahlberg (2011), titled *Lessons from Finland*, outlines the Finnish model of teacher education, which includes a framework of practicum placements that Canadian teacher education programs may wish to model. Finland is known for its excellent teachers and leaders, and it continually scores high on international testing measures of student achievement. Along with the extremely selective admittance process, extended program

timeframe (i.e., 5 to 7.5 years), and research-based programming, practical training in schools is very important within the Finnish model (Sahlberg, 2011). The practicum experience accounts for 15-25% of a teacher's preparation time and mentor teachers must prove they are competent to work with teacher candidates.

Ussher (2010) discusses the idea that extending the professional learning community for teacher candidates, such as placing teacher candidates in schools known to have collegial staff, will allow more opportunities for interactions and improved perceptions about learning to teach. Allowing teacher candidates to be a part of a professional learning community should provide them with the chance to get to know the school community, interact with many different people, and have a sense of belonging within the school.

Throughout this chapter, themes within teacher education have been explored with specific attention paid to the practicum placement. Although the information gathered is related to the traditional consecutive 1-year model of teacher education, many of the issues are relevant to the concurrent model.

Chapter Three presents the methodology for the research including the research design, research questions, selection of sites and participants, instrumentation, data collection and analysis, limitations, establishing credibility, methodological assumptions, and ethics. Chapter Three ends with a summary of the chapter.

CHAPTER THREE: METHODOLOGY

Throughout this study, the perceptions of teacher candidates were examined to understand the value of practicum placement. New teachers need to be fully prepared to teach in schools within Ontario, and it was the aim of this study to contribute to an understanding of the teacher preparation process, at least with respect to practicum experiences.

Appropriately, an examination of the methodology and design, selection of sites and participants, instrumentation, data collection and analysis, methodological assumptions, credibility, and ethical considerations are described in order to provide one with an in-depth understanding of both the study and its process.

Research Methodology and Design

Teacher candidates' experiences within their specific concurrent education program were examined with specific attention paid to practicum placement experience. A mixed method research design that focuses on teacher candidates' experiences and their perceptions of teacher education was used. The rationale for the choice of mixed methods will be discussed in the following paragraph.

The mixed methods research design described by Creswell (2012) is a combination of both qualitative and quantitative data, which provides a better understanding of the research questions than either method used alone. Using a mixed methods design allows the researcher to use the strengths of both qualitative and quantitative data to help illuminate a topic that needs more than just one type of data collection. An explanatory sequential design was utilized in this research in order to use the quantitative data to help with the overall general picture and the qualitative data to

explain the findings and provide more detail surrounding the research. Creswell describes explanatory sequential design as consisting of, first, collecting quantitative data and analysis (e.g., questionnaires), followed by qualitative data collection and analysis (e.g., interviews). Explanatory sequential design, or the two-phase model, is exemplified in this research because quantitative data was collected first and the qualitative data were used to refine findings from the quantitative phase of research. This study utilized two methods of data collection (i.e., questionnaires and interviews).

In this study, a questionnaire was used to gather the perceptions of teacher candidates from two universities within Ontario. This component surveyed a purposeful sample of the population of interest at two teacher education programs in Ontario. The data collected from the questionnaire were quantified and used to make comparisons within these two teacher education institutions. The interview included in this study provided a more thorough understanding of the teacher candidates' experiences and perceptions of their concurrent teacher education program.

Selection of Sites and Participants

The selection of the sites and participants is a crucial element of the research process. In order to obtain a well-rounded view of concurrent teacher education, two universities were chosen, each with different program organization. In addition, these two universities also varied in terms of the time and structure of their practicum placements. The two universities were identified as Full Integration of Practicum Program (FIPP) and Minimal Integration of Practicum Program (MIPP), nomenclature that were chosen based on the degree to which practicum placements are offered to teacher candidates.

Participants were sought through email communication from faculties of education at these universities. Teacher candidates in their final year, or fifth year, of their teacher education program were utilized in this research. This year was chosen due to the varying amounts of practicum throughout the programs. Some students will experience practicum placements only in their final year of the program, making this the most appropriate time to collect data. Once administrators from each faculty of education agreed to allow this research to proceed, a letter of invitation was emailed to all teacher candidates within their final year at each university. This letter outlined the purpose of the study, described the process, listed the benefits of their participation, and asked for participant consent. The email contained a link for teacher candidates to access if they were interested in the study and decided to participate. Teacher candidates were asked to acknowledge their consent by clicking the link at the bottom of the email. Upon clicking, the teacher candidates were directed to the letter of consent and, once consent was given, they were linked to the online questionnaire.

Department heads at each university were asked to distribute the questionnaire and participation was optional. Thirty-five individuals completed the questionnaire, 21 participants from FIPP, and 14 from MIPP. Participants ranged in age from 20 to 24 years old, and most questionnaire participants were female, with one male from FIPP and three males from MIPP. From FIPP, 10 participants were studying in a primary/junior qualification stream, 10 were junior/intermediate, and one from an intermediate/senior stream. From MIPP two participants were studying in a primary/junior qualification stream, seven were junior/intermediate, and five were intermediate/senior. These participants indicated on the questionnaire whether they would like to be considered to

participate in the interview portion of the research. Thirteen individuals indicated on the questionnaire that they would be interested in completing an interview, eight from MIPP and five from FIPP. All 13 participants were invited to participate in the interview and of those, three individuals from each institution were interviewed. Qualification levels for interview participants were four primary/junior (two from each program), one junior/intermediate (from FIPP), and one intermediate/senior qualification (from MIPP).

Instrumentation

Two instruments were designed to facilitate data collection about teacher candidate perception of the value of their practicum: a questionnaire and a semistructured interview. These two instruments are described in the following section.

Teacher Candidate Questionnaire

The questionnaire (see Appendix A) is divided into sections, addressing different aspects of teacher education programs with specific focus on the context of the practicum. The questionnaire topics include participant information, mentor/associate teacher, time/preparedness, university/school connection, context of the practicum, connection between theory and practice, reflective practice, and additional information.

The first section of the questionnaire was comprised of demographic items focusing on variables, such as age, sex at birth, university name, and program level. Participants were also asked to briefly outline their practicum experience for each year of the program. This descriptive data set was analyzed for statistical comparisons.

The next sections of the teacher candidate questionnaire use a 5-point Likert scale to help determine the participants' perception of the effectiveness of their teacher education program. Participants were able to indicate their perceptions of the

effectiveness of the program as excellent, good, acceptable, poor, or very poor. A 5-point Likert scale was chosen because there is strength in an odd numbered scale that allows participants room for neutrality without forcing an opinion (Croasmun & Ostrom, 2011). This questionnaire was adapted from Ingvarson et al.'s (2007) Opportunity to Learn Scales.

The final section of the questionnaire asked teacher candidates to rank the various aspects of their teacher education program and, more specifically, whether their practicum was most influential in their development. This provided an overview of teacher candidates' experience with different aspects of the practicum.

Postquestionnaire Interview

Initially, focus groups were to be used following the questionnaire, but, due to scheduling conflicts, only one focus group was conducted at MIPP and the rest were interviews. These interviews were used to obtain a more thorough understanding of teacher candidates' experiences and perceptions of their teacher education programs, with specific attention to the practicum. Upon completing the questionnaire, participants were asked for their voluntary involvement in the interview to gather additional information about the teacher education program at their university. Participants who expressed interest in participating in the interview phase of the research were contacted via email to organize a time and place to conduct the interview. A semistructured interview protocol (see Appendix B) guided the interview process to strengthen design and ensure consistency between interviews. Guiding questions allowed participants to speak about their experiences freely, while touching on themes from the questionnaire.

Interviews were chosen as the qualitative form of data collection in order to expand on information obtained from the questionnaire to gain a deeper understanding of the perceptions of teacher candidates' practicum experiences. Interviews are beneficial because participants can describe detailed experiences and the researcher can ask specific questions to gain clarification and better understand the participant's experiences (Creswell, 2012).

Data Collection

Two different instruments were used in this research to collect data. The teacher candidate questionnaire and the postquestionnaire interview were utilized to solicit data. Each instrument was intended to provide a thorough understanding of teacher candidates' experiences and perceptions of their teacher education program.

Data Analysis

The data collected were analyzed in order to provide a larger picture of teacher education within Ontario.

Scoring the Teacher Candidate Questionnaire: Descriptive statistical analysis.

Personal information on the participants was gathered in order to better understand the demographics of those involved in the study. Information, such as age, sex, and program of study, were collected to allow for comparisons within and across the two universities.

Scoring the Teacher Candidate Questionnaire: Inferential statistical analysis. The questionnaire was used to measure candidates' experiences within their specific teacher education program (e.g., curriculum, courses, and practicum). Using this instrument, participants rated their agreement towards statements using a 5-point Likert scale. The options for each statement were 5 strongly agree, 4 agree, 3 neutral, 2 disagree, and 1

strongly disagree. Independent samples t-test were conducted using PASW/SPSS (version 20) software to compare the data from the two institutions.

Analyzing the Postquestionnaire Interview

The focus group interview data were analyzed by hand. First, there was a preliminary exploratory analysis of the data that included reading through the transcripts. Then the text was reduced into codes. These codes were then arranged into themes, which proved to fit into the initial topics found in the literature review. According to Creswell (2012), thematic data analysis allows for a distillation of the salient ideas found within the data in order to provide insight into participants' thoughts and views. Themes were arranged into their appropriate topic.

Establishing Credibility

The choice of methodology helped to establish credibility because there were multiple sources of data to enrich the study. Morse (2003) notes the benefit of a mixed methods design because the qualitative part of the study provides explanation for particular aspects of the quantitative part of the study, triangulating the results. Triangulation is described by Morse as a combination of two or more thorough types of data collection that provide a more comprehensive picture together than if done independently. The quantitative data were analyzed first and then helped inform the questions for the semistructured interviews. This process aided the first phase of the research to inform the second phase and allowed for deeper understanding of teacher candidates' perceptions. Creswell (2012) describes using both quantitative and qualitative data as a way to bring out the strengths of both types of research while neutralizing the weaknesses. Interpretive adequacy was established through member checking by having

the participants look over the transcripts and give feedback as to the accuracy of the information. Participants were allowed to make changes if they felt that the information was not reflective of the interview.

Methodological Assumptions

Methodological assumptions include the belief that participants were honest in their responses about their experiences in teacher education. There was also the assumption that participants would adequately recall their practicum experiences. This research involved participants remembering parts of their teacher education program that may go back several years, and it was assumed that those individuals would be able to answer both the questionnaire and the interview questions with accuracy.

Ethical Considerations

Prior to recruitment of participants, clearance of the proposed research was obtained from Brock University's research ethics board (12-133 – ENGEMANN) as well as the research ethics boards of the other universities involved. Specific to this research, the issues of informed consent, participant withdrawal, and confidentiality are discussed in the remainder of this chapter.

Informed Consent

Invitation to be a part of the study was sent to teacher candidates through the education department chair of each university. A letter of invitation was in the form of an email outlining the research. This letter indicated that participation in the study was voluntary, that participants had the right to withdraw at any time, and that there were potential risks, such as feeling overwhelmed, or benefits, such as improving teacher education, to participation. There was an electronic link that teacher candidates were

asked to click if they agreed to participate and this action provided the researcher with each participant's informed consent.

Participant Withdrawal

Participants had the right to withdraw from the study at any point. If they had decided to withdraw prior to analysis, their information would not have been included as part of the overall data and would have been destroyed. This was not necessary for this research.

Confidentiality

All information that is linked to participants was kept in a secure location and was password protected. Once information was gathered, a code was assigned to each participant in order to remove all distinguishable features that could have been traced back to him or her.

Summary of the Chapter

The purpose of this study was to understand the most effective practices in concurrent education programs that contribute to the preparation of teacher candidates to teach in Ontario as perceived by teacher candidates within Ontario.

The research methodology and design, selection of sites and participants, instruments, data collection and analysis, credibility, methodological assumptions, and ethical considerations were discussed.

Chapter Four contains the presentation of results through themes.

CHAPTER FOUR: PRESENTATION OF RESULTS

The study of traditional consecutive teacher education has helped improve programs throughout the years, while research on concurrent education needs to be increased. Ure (2010) believes that more needs to be done to better prepare teachers for the demands of their profession by making changes in the way teacher candidates are educated. The purpose of this study was to understand the most effective practices that contribute to the preparation of concurrent teacher candidates to teach in Ontario as perceived by teacher candidates within Ontario. This study aimed to shed light on concurrent teacher education and hopefully helps to understand how practicum placements can be used best in this context.

Specifically, the research questions investigated:

1. How do concurrent students perceive the value of practicum placements in terms of developing their facility to teach?
2. What do concurrent students view as the optimal context for practicum placements within concurrent education?
3. What aspects of practicum, if any, need improvement?

A mixed methodology was utilized in this study to help provide a well-rounded view of concurrent teacher education within two Ontario institutions. The questionnaire was partially adapted from Ingvarson et al.'s (2007) Opportunity to Learn Scales.

Participants in this study were concurrent teacher candidates from two universities in Ontario, Canada, which have been named FIPP and MIPP. Every participant voluntarily completed an online questionnaire, while some agreed additionally to complete an interview about their experiences in the program. Their perception of their

concurrent education program was measured using a questionnaire that incorporated mostly quantitative features and a single qualitative feature (an open-ended question). This included a section that researched general areas, such as participant and program information, as well as questions about different aspects of teacher candidates' practicum experiences within their teacher education program. Question topics included mentor teacher, placement time and preparedness, connection to district school boards, theory-practice divide, reflective practice, and questions about the practicum component of their teacher education. The qualitative aspect of the survey was an open-ended question regarding what teacher candidates believe could be improved with regards to their teacher education program. The quantitative data were analyzed using PASW/SPSS (version 20) software. The qualitative features allowed teacher candidates to discuss their individual experiences within their teacher education, specifically their practicum experiences throughout their 5-year program. As well, different aspects of the program were discussed in the interview to determine the teacher candidates' perceptions of the effectiveness of their training. These qualitative data were coded to delineate common themes.

The research findings are reported in this chapter by themes found in both the questionnaire data as well as the semistructured interview data.

Time/Preparedness

Time and preparedness was a predominant theme found in both the survey and interview data. These results differed between FIPP ($M = 3.95$, $SD = .59$, $n = 21$) and MIPP ($M = 2.86$, $SD = .80$, $n = 13$). An independent-samples t -test showed that the difference between conditions was significant ($t = 4.56$, $df = 32$, $p < .05$). All interview

and focus group participants agreed that longer placements are optimal for teacher training. FullIntegration3 said “You can see more of the process that goes into teaching than maybe you do for just two weeks at a time.”

Although participants from the FIPP were generally satisfied with the time they spent in practicum, one participant did reveal that she would have liked more time for observation. FullIntegration2 said:

We would all benefit from more observation because even though you are partaking in the day when you’re teaching, you are not able to observe as much as what’s going on around you and I feel like because sometimes we lack that observation when I am put into a teaching role its harder to keep the consistency for the students because I didn’t have adequate observation... I think we could benefit from more observation time for sure.

Similarly, in the MIPP, MinimalIntegration3 described the lack of observation before practicum blocks. After only two days of observation, she was expected to teach a classroom of students, adding, “[it] is impossible then to implement like differentiated instruction and all those ideas because you have no idea who the kids are.”

The MIPP participants all spoke of the lack of practicum within their program. MinimalIntegration1 held “it would have been nice to have the time increase and having more opportunities to teach as a requirement.” When asked if practicum was integrated in the five years of the program, MinimalIntegration2 said “I think that I would I would have ideally liked them to have been and it makes sense that they should be but I didn't feel that they were the center or the focus of it early on.” One participant went as far as to say

I think that in a heartbeat I would leave the [university] campus altogether and be in a classroom teaching or watching. Like the whole year you know? The odd class is great but um you know we could sacrifice what we are doing at [the university] for more learning to happen in a practical way. (MinimalIntegration3)

Although the participants from the FIPP generally agreed that there was enough practicum in their teacher education program ($M = 4.15$), they still saw the value of gradually increasing responsibility over time. FullIntegration3 added, “increasing responsibility is where you grow the most.”

Mentor

Perceptions of mentor teachers did not differ between FIPP ($M = 4.01$, $SD = .50$, $n = 20$) and MIPP ($M = 3.87$, $SD = .48$, $n = 14$). An independent-samples t -test showed that the difference between conditions was not significant ($t = 0.82$, $df = 32$, $p = .417$). The majority of interviewees agreed that exceptional mentor teachers or associate teachers (ATs) are one of the most influential aspects of their teacher education. FullIntegration3 described her mentor teacher’s classroom:

She had like a Bloom’s Taxonomy like it didn’t say Bloom’s Taxonomy on it but it was a question grid so you are supposed to be asking the thick questions which are like in these boxes and it was the higher order right the high or the low, how and what questions not these question and it said every kid had a copy of that and it was taped to the front of their language book like she was different in that sense like it was obvious. Not asking the thin questions as you are reading you are asking the thick questions and that was on a piece of paper that was like up in her

room and it was different in that sense for her. Like she made it obvious to the kids like this is what I am looking for and this is what you should be doing.

Also, equally mentioned in interviews were the poor matches between teacher candidates and mentors. Most of the participants did not believe there was any screening process for mentor teachers and thought this could potentially decrease the number of bad matches. MinimalIntegration3 described a potential solution to the mentor problem: “I also think vetting associate teachers would be a great idea... knowing who the associate teachers are and making sure that they are good before you send someone.” A participant from the FIPP also mentioned this:

some sort of like evaluation of the teacher both for the students who are sent in there so there is accountability for this to happen because like if they’re going to send students into bad placements then you’re learning something but you’re probably not learning what they expect you to learn. (FullIntegration1)

Interviews revealed that participants believed that both flexibility and an understanding of practicum expectations were important when working with mentor teachers. FullIntegration2 described her current mentor teacher: “my associate is very flexible and is constantly checking to make sure I’m ok to be teaching up and was very understanding providing me a little extra observation time.” When she needed more observation, there was flexibility in the teaching schedule as well as checking in with her to make sure the amount of teaching was appropriate.

Both program participants had mentors that understood the practicum expectations as well as mentors who had little to no understanding of the practicum expectations. One of the participants described a first time mentor teacher she had:

She ha[d] never had a student teacher before so she had no she had no idea what to do... she didn't even know how to access like the evaluation form... I know there were other student teachers in the same school as me and when their associates were talking to mine they also did not know exactly what they were supposed to be looking for. (MinimalIntegreation3)

A similar experience happened to FullIntegration2 when she had a mentor that expected her to take on full teaching responsibilities in her second year of her concurrent program:

when I walked into the classroom she just, I felt like she expected a lot and that's where I guess you could say our miscommunication was because I don't think she was understanding fully what my role was in a second year of Con. Ed. It was almost like I was being compared to a student teacher in a consecutive program.

Conversely, three of the participants, MinimalIntegration1, MinimalIntegration2, and FullIntegration3, had mentor teachers who had been through concurrent education programs and had a very good understanding of the practicum.

University and District School Board Connection

The universities connection with school boards did not differ between FIPP ($M = 3.67$, $SD = .87$, $n = 21$) and MIPP ($M = 3.18$, $SD = .50$, $n = 14$). An independent-samples t -test showed that the difference between conditions was not significant ($t = 1.89$, $df = 33$, $p = .067$).

Stronger connections with school boards allowed students to build relationships with their practicum schools. FullIntegration3 described the importance of creating a sense of community:

And also just getting involved in the school because you are there for 2 solid weeks you can get involved in things or like in this last placement I was supervising intermural at lunch you can do things like that because you are there every day of the week right... so that also provides a huge amount of growth like getting involved in other things in the school that's going on that's not just teaching in the classroom.

Context of the Practicum

The context of the practicum results differed between FIPP ($M = 4.05$, $SD = .66$, $n = 20$) and MIPP ($M = 3.03$, $SD = .79$, $n = 13$). An independent-samples t -test showed that the difference between conditions was significant ($t = 4.04$, $df = 31$, $p < .05$). Many of the participants spoke about the importance and the need for accountability surrounding the practicum. FullIntegration1 believed that “there should have been more accountability.” Many participants spoke about how the evaluation of the practicum was inadequate. MinimalIntegration3 said,

I also think that if you fail practicums you should have to go back to teachers college again. Um and I know people who are getting [high grades] and they are going to come out with the same OCT certification as people coming out with [low grades].

The evaluation of the practicum also seemed awkward and not representative of the practicum as a whole:

I found that the visit from the advisors was also its difficult to time and I found myself like changing things around so that they saw a certain lesson. But because they are out of touch and don't get it they are not happy if they come in and we

are just acting out Shakespeare for an hour that's not what they want to see but that's what we are doing! And that's what we have to do. So that was that was kind of difficult. Um and it is kind of at the expense of the kids.

(MinimalIntegration3)

Participants also highlighted the importance of constructive feedback. FullIntegration3 talked about how feedback helped her strengthen her teaching ability: "I basically judge like what I needed to work on in the classroom based on the evaluations." She mentioned that pacing was something she was instructed to work on over the years of her teacher education, and she continually aimed to improve this with feedback from mentor teachers and teacher educators. In contrast, the lack of feedback early on in the program was evident. MinimalIntegration2 described:

we didn't get any feedback on how we were doing really in the placements other than they wrote you a letter of reference if you asked them. Or I guess if you specifically asked but having the reports and the debriefing time this year with your teacher helps you to grow and to improve yourself and to see areas that you need. So it was mostly whether if we could think of it or not early on whereas having some form of feedback or some of your grade on how successful you were or how open to improving or suggestions would have been beneficial too.

Another important aspect within the context of the practicum raised by interviewees was how lesson plans are utilized. MinimalIntegration3 believed that her university's program was:

outdated with what's happening now. So like you know printing out lesson plans every day? Well you download their form onto your computer why would I print

it out every day and make notes on it when I can clearly delete and replace things? Replace ideas, or leave notes for myself or use a digital calendar um and so a lot of my like both associates were saying that it's hard to evaluate based on what [the university] says because what [the university] is saying is not best practices for teaching anymore.

FullIntegration3 spoke about the large amount of time that went into writing lesson plans and how she “just moved to daybook planning on Monday and it was the best day of [her] life.”

The issue of placement variety (e.g., demographics, grades, areas) was also mentioned throughout the interviews. FullIntegration3 described her program's aim to provide variety to students as follows: “So they do try like I know [our teacher educator] tries to do that so if you are primary junior you are going to have especially in fifth year you are going to have 1 placement that is in primary and you are going to have 1 placement in junior its guaranteed.” By contrast, MinimalIntegration3 spoke about how her program views variety of placements in the following way: “None of those things are like requirements from my advisors, they don't care if you like where you're put.”

Theory-Practice Divide

Theory-practice divide results differed between FIPP ($M = 3.98, SD = .55, n = 20$) and MIPP ($M = 2.88, SD = 1.19, n = 12$). An independent-samples t -test showed that the difference between conditions was highly significant ($t = 3.58, df = 30, p = .001$). Both universities' participants highlighted the issue that teacher education is disconnected with real teaching because of its ideal views. FullIntegration3 said that “I feel there is sort of a disconnect just because everything that you learned in school may be a little idealistic and

doesn't necessarily happen in the classroom... They're practical in what they teach you but I feel like even still it doesn't necessarily fully line up with what happens in the classroom." Although students at the FIPP generally agree that their teacher education was practice-based, there is still a gap between teacher education and the real world of teaching. At the MIPP, one participant spoke about how the idealistic views of teaching affected her practicum experience:

I think also a problem at the beginning for me and I know a lot of my friends as well was that we'd been like we had this like idea hammered into our heads that if your lessons are good and they are current and they are interesting all the kids are going to be amazing. And they don't and they won't because they are human but it's hard when you are being told that for like 5 years now and then you get there and you realize you think you are doing something wrong for the first little while until you can understand whatever is affecting the child, that that doesn't always have to do with you. Um but that's a big one for self-confidence.

(MinimalIntegration3)

Another student echoed her views "we learn the ideal world here. Like and it's not like that in the classrooms all the time" (MinimalIntegration1).

Some participants spoke about how practicum helps connect theory and practice over time. FullIntegration2 said

having that opportunity to go out and test it or see different theories in action it definitely molds your own personal theory so I don't necessarily I can't pinpoint one theory of teaching from a textbook I've kind of have more of an eclectic

because I've seen many various theories and even the same theory being modeled in a different way.

The disconnect between theory and practice was evident when MinimalIntegration3 said:

I found actually the bigger difference for the academic kids a lot of the things from [MIPP] work um a lot of the ideas worked but with my applied classes it was much better to run a class in a traditional way. They liked it better they liked seatwork, they liked coming in and doing a grammar worksheet right when they came in. They actually enjoyed it they like knowing what to expect. You can't do like five transitions and this and that because you can't they can't process it.

MinimalIntegration2 offered a solution, adding

being in a classroom at the same time throughout just makes it become more real and you can compare the experiences that you are having in your classroom with what you are learning and it makes you learn the material better too.

One important aspect of the theory-practice divide that surfaced during interviews was the teacher educators within the concurrent programs. MinimalIntegration1 offered:

some teachers like the teachers that we had this year who were actual classroom teachers for sure like they got it. They get it like they understand what's going on in the schools and what we need to know. But teachers who have been retired or teachers who haven't been in there for a while they don't get it.

MinimalIntegration3 believes many teacher educators “are quite out of touch with what actually goes on in schools.” Support from teacher educators also had a profound impact on a few interviewees from both universities. MinimalIntegration1 noted that having

“teachers who have a vested interest in getting to know you” is very important within teacher education.

Reflection

Reflection results did not differ between FIPP ($M = 4.03, SD = .59, n = 20$) and MIPP ($M = 4.10, SD = .59, n = 12$). An independent-samples t -test showed that the difference between conditions was not significant ($t = -0.33, df = 30, p = .747$). The most common theme that surfaced on reflection was the importance of discussions about practicum experiences with peers, in order to learn from everyone’s experiences, or as MinimalIntegration3 suggested, “collaboratively learning what other people learned.” Reflecting on peers’ experiences was believed to be a rich learning opportunity by MinimalIntegration2; however, “there wasn't that time being able to collaborate ideas and you see if something was challenging for you if someone else was having the same problem could have helped.” The opportunity for reflection with peers was viewed as important, but often believed to be missed at MIPP. On the other hand, FullIntegration3 described the importance of creating a community within the peer groups and learning from each other. She said:

the group of us the 60 or whatever of my classmates that are in the program that really make the experience... we all moved home in December we but we all stay in contact and share resources and everybody asks if they need help they’re everyone else is there to support them and give them ideas and that sort of thing and that to me is just a really awesome connection that we've made that I don’t think is very common. (FullIntegration3)

Additional Findings

The results from questions surrounding the use of technology within the practicum did not differ between FIPP ($M = 3.57, SD = 1.03, n = 21$) and MIPP ($M = 3.79, SD = 1.05, n = 14$). An independent-samples t -test showed that the difference between conditions was not significant ($t = -0.60, df = 33, p = .553$).

The independent question “My practicum(s) was at the heart of the program within my teacher education (thoroughly integrated into the program, related to teaching theories, and supported by mentor teachers who model what is learned within the program)” results differed between FIPP ($M = 3.80, SD = 1.06, n = 20$) and MIPP ($M = 2.54, SD = 1.51, n = 13$). An independent-samples t -test showed that the difference between conditions was significant ($t = 2.83, df = 31, p = .008$).

The independent question “When in my placement(s), I felt respected as an educator” results differed between FIPP ($M = 4.00, SD = 0.97, n = 20$) and MIPP ($M = 3.23, SD = 1.17, n = 13$). An independent-samples t -test showed that the difference between conditions was significant ($t = 2.05, df = 31, p = .049$).

The independent question “My teacher education program has the right amount of practicum experience” results differed between FIPP ($M = 4.15, SD = 0.59, n = 20$) and MIPP ($M = 1.62, SD = 1.12, n = 13$). An independent-samples t -test showed that the difference between conditions was significant ($t = 8.518, df = 31, p < .05$).

The independent question “My practicum(s) helped me decide if I want to stay in the profession or not” results differed between FIPP ($M = 4.65, SD = 0.49, n = 20$) and MIPP ($M = 4.00, SD = 0.91, n = 13$). An independent-samples t -test showed that the difference between conditions was significant ($t = 2.66, df = 31, p = .012$).

The independent question “My practicum experience(s) was a valuable part of my preparation to become a teacher” results did not differ between FIPP ($M = 4.53$, $SD = 0.57$, $n = 19$) and MIPP ($M = 4.38$, $SD = 0.65$, $n = 13$). An independent-samples t -test showed that the difference between conditions was significant ($t = 1.22$, $df = 30$, $p = .232$).

The independent question “My teacher education program needs improvement” results differed between FIPP ($M = 2.95$, $SD = 0.83$, $n = 20$) and MIPP ($M = 4.46$, $SD = 1.127$, $n = 13$). An independent-samples t -test showed that the difference between conditions was significant ($t = -4.45$, $df = 31$, $p < .05$). This Likert scale was followed by an open-ended question asking “What can be improved?” In the open-ended section of this question, within the FIPP, 10 people responded with text. The first theme found was making more distinct connections between theory and practice. One student wrote, “Continuing the link between theoretical approaches and the practical uses within the classroom,” while another argued, “teach what you need to know as a teacher... not just theory.” Another theme found in the open-ended question was more support and exposure to the real job market such as alternative jobs for teachers and more focus on how to prepare for the market (learning about supply teaching and additional qualification courses). One student expressed this idea, stating

more service learning placement time in 5th year. With the teaching world the way it is right now in terms of job prospects, we as teachers need to be exposed to what else is out there for us in terms of jobs. I feel that we have already had enough practice teaching time and could use more service learning to find an alternate route for our futures.

Another student believed a course on substitute teaching would have been beneficial because many graduates of the program will be moving into that role.

The MIPP had 12 people respond to the open-ended question “What can be improved?” with text. Eleven mentioned more time in the classroom throughout the program would be beneficial such as a participant who wrote “for a concurrent program we didn't have enough opportunity to have actual placements within the classroom” and “[t]here should be more classroom integration for practicing teachers from the beginning of university starting in year 1.” Six respondents thought that there should be less observation and more teaching within placements. One participant wrote “[t]eaching placements in years 1-4 - not observation placements” and “[w]e only got to "observe" during our undergrad rather than teach.” Four participants commented on the poor quality of teacher educators within the program. One person believed the “Professors of nearly all education classes are terrible” and another simply put “[h]igher quality educators, less nonsense.”

A one-way ANOVA was used to compare each section of the survey (mentor teacher, time and preparedness, university school connection, context of the practicum, theory-practice divide, reflection, and general) with each of the different qualification levels of teacher certification within the universities (*P/J*, *J/I*, *I/S* certification) and yielded no statistical differences among the program levels.

In summary, the findings revealed that students were generally more satisfied with the overall program when there was full integration of practicum. Generally, all participants agreed that the practicum is one of the most important aspects of teacher education and should be utilized throughout the full 5 years of concurrent education.

There were differences found between the two concurrent programs on time and preparedness, context of the practicum, and theory-practice divide. There was also a statistically significant difference observed between the teacher candidates believing their program needs improvement. These findings were supported throughout the interviews and have implications for some changes that could occur to improve these programs.

In this chapter, the results were reported by themes found in both the questionnaire data as well as the semistructured interview data. Chapter Five consists of the summary, discussion, and implications of the research. The suggestions of teacher candidates will also be discussed in the following chapter.

CHAPTER FIVE: SUMMARY, DISCUSSION, AND IMPLICATIONS

The study of traditional consecutive teacher education has helped improve programs throughout the years, while research on concurrent education needs to be increased. Researchers, such as Clandinin et al. (2009), are calling for changes to the way we educate teachers, and with the current discussions on increasing consecutive teacher education from 1 year to 2 years, this is a pivotal time for examining the effectiveness of all teacher education. There is a high correlation between the feeling of preparedness and the likelihood of becoming effective teachers (AyPay, 2009) and, therefore, the study aimed to uncover how best to prepare teacher candidates.

The purpose of this study was to understand what concurrent teacher candidates perceive as the most effective practicum experiences that contribute to teacher preparation in Ontario. Zeichner (1992) believes the

movement to restructure the practicum and integrate it with in-service teacher education and school reform involves major changes in the roles and responsibilities of those who work in the practicum and a significant shift in the distribution of power between schools and universities. (p. 296)

Practicum placements within concurrent teacher education were examined in this study to shed light on concurrent teacher education and help to understand how practicum placements can be used best in this context. Quantitative and qualitative data analysis techniques were utilized to explore teacher candidates' perceptions of the overall effectiveness of programs with specific focus on the practicum placement. These findings helped to determine possible areas of improvement. To gain an understanding of the

research conducted, a summary of the study, discussion of the findings, and an examination of the implications of the results are presented in this chapter.

Summary of the Study

In this study, a questionnaire was used to collect data of teacher candidates' perceptions. The aim was to determine the extent to which two Ontario concurrent teacher education programs were effective in utilizing the practicum to prepare new teachers. The questionnaire asked for background information on each participant and Likert scale questions about their perception of the effectiveness of their teacher education program. This questionnaire was partially adapted from Ingvarson et al.'s (2007) Opportunity to Learn Scales. In addition, interviews were conducted with selected teacher candidates in order to provide a greater understanding of their experiences. The results of the study are presented in this section.

Overall, the findings revealed that the practicum is very important to the success of concurrent education and it needs to be fully integrated into the whole program to provide the best teacher training possible. The data analysis revealed that teacher candidates from the FIPP institution were generally more satisfied with their program, while students from the MIPP institution were generally unsatisfied. The data also revealed teacher candidates from the FIPP perceived the context of their practicum to be more effective as well as the connection between theory and practice to be stronger than the MIPP students. Interview data supported the survey findings as many interviewees from the MIPP described how the lack of practicum within the program affected their overall experience.

Although the survey revealed no statistically significant difference between the two programs regarding mentor teachers, there was a slight difference in the results of the interviews. Students from the MIPP mentioned the importance of feedback and their experience with a lack of constructive feedback as well as the need for gradual release of responsibility. Otherwise, it appeared from the interviews that all participants have similar perceptions of mentor teachers. Students from both programs spoke about the importance of influential mentors who understand expectations and are flexible, and also talked about their experiences with bad matches. Interestingly, all students who spoke about a bad match mentioned that the match was due to differing views on teaching philosophy with their mentors, which is often difficult to avoid. Most interviewees believed that exceptional mentors are important and poor mentors should be avoided, if possible.

Analysis of the data available from the survey showed that there was no statistically significant difference between the FIPP and MIPP programs in terms of the university connection with district school boards and reflection. These findings were supported in the interviews, as there was no distinct view on the connection between the university and schools other than the general view that the connection is important. Similarly, reflection was also viewed as important by both programs.

Discussion

In this section, the results are examined to understand teacher candidates' perceptions of their concurrent education program: specifically, how they utilized the practicum throughout their program and the implications that these findings may have upon the concurrent programs and teacher educators within Ontario. Finally, the

participants' suggestions for improving their teacher education program were reviewed. This investigation revealed valuable suggestions for teacher educators when discussing ways to improve concurrent teacher education programs.

The findings from the research are examined first. The three themes from the survey that were not statistically significant (i.e., the mentor teacher, university connection with district school board, and reflection) are examined and connected with the interview data. The three themes that did have statistically significant differences between the two programs (i.e., time and preparedness, context of the practicum, and theory-practice divide) are examined in terms of how they relate to interview data. Through examination of these themes, the research questions that underpin this study are explored.

Mentor

Mentor teachers are an integral part of learning to be a teacher. In fact, Ezer et al. (2010) found they were one of the most influential agents of change within teacher training. This study supported the common belief that mentor teachers are of utmost importance within the practicum. Participants from both programs agreed that exemplary mentor teachers are the key to optimal practicum placements. Darling-Hammond (2006b) believes that learning from experts is very important to teacher candidate success. All students should have the opportunity to learn from an expert teacher. Teacher candidates in the interviews spoke about some of the characteristics that made their mentor teachers exceptional. Mutual respect was very important to participants, such as feeling an important part of their placement classroom and being viewed as educators in that space. Participants also spoke about the benefits of supportive mentor teachers who would allow

teacher candidates to take risks, try new approaches, and use their practicum as an opportunity to explore their personal teaching styles. It is important for teacher candidates to explore their own teaching style in their practicum placements instead of simply mirroring their mentor teacher. Smith and Lev-Ari (2005) found that mentors provide the most support to teacher candidates during practicum over peers and support groups. Many of the interviewees with exceptional mentors spoke about their practicum as a time of growth for both teacher candidate and mentor. The rich learning that takes place when a teacher candidate feels respected and supported creates an environment for growth. Fazio, Melville, and Bartley (2010) believe that mentor support that is aligned with course work helps to create the most cohesive teacher education.

Participants also talked about the importance of a flexible mentor. Allowing space for teacher candidates to explore within the practicum, while also taking the time to teach when they were ready, were important to teacher candidates. Smith and Lev-Ari (2005) found that half of the teacher candidates in their study highly valued the chance to teach when they were ready. Some participants spoke about the need to take another day of observation before teaching because they still did not know the classroom routines or even the students' names, while others spoke about taking on more responsibility than was required because they were ready and wanted the challenge.

Mentor feedback was also significant for many participants. Hascher et al. (2004) found that learning mostly came from the mentor's feedback within the practicum, showing the importance of ongoing feedback. Constant dialogue surrounding a teacher candidate's practicum is important for improvement while also supporting ongoing reflective practice. When mentor teachers model reflective practice, it allows teacher

candidates to see and hear what reflection on your teaching looks like and encourages constant evolution of teaching skills.

Although every interviewee spoke of an exceptional mentor, each shared an experience with a poor one. Many teacher candidates have negative experiences with mentor teachers and this needs to be improved (Boz & Boz, 2006). These mentors did not share feedback, were inflexible, often did not understand the practicum expectations, and did not support their teacher candidates throughout the practicum. Mentors often determine the learning context (Hascher et al., 2004) and, thus, it is important to have exceptional mentors to create exceptional practicums. Sometimes differing teaching philosophies weakened the connection with the mentor, but often the participants described mentors who were not passionate about their profession or were ready for retirement. When poor teachers become mentors, their mentees witness ineffective teaching methods (Nguyen, 2009). Placing students in front of a bad mentor may allow teacher candidates to identify characteristics they do not want to have as an educator, but clearly the richest learning opportunity comes from allowing teacher candidates to be mentored by exceptional teachers who are passionate about providing the best education to their students and helping future teachers do the same.

In order to provide teacher candidates with exemplary mentors, it is necessary to vet possible educators for that role. Ontario should look at the Finnish teacher education model where mentor teachers must prove they are competent to work with teacher candidates (Sahlberg, 2011). A few interview participants spoke about the need for vetting associate teachers to avoid disastrous practicum placements. Teacher educators and administrative staff at universities need to ensure that students are going into

placements that will provide a positive learning experience for all involved. At the very least, they must ensure that when a teacher candidate has a negative experience, the mentoring teacher will not participate in the program again. Exceptional teachers should be encouraged to share their gift with future teachers and help them on their educational journey.

Zeichner (1992) also thinks that teacher candidates should be assigned to a team of teachers instead of one individual. Grierson, Cantalini-Williams, Wideman-Johnston, and Tedesco (2011) also think that peer mentorship programs can benefit teacher candidates in terms of confidence and professional growth. Imagine the exposure and insight teacher candidates would gain from being in many different classrooms with a variety of mentor teachers. Rethinking the way we place teacher candidates with mentors could greatly benefit the practicum placement.

Zeichner (2002) states that there is clear evidence that mentoring is not valued in schools and in universities such as lack of preparation and support for the work and lack of incentives and rewards for doing a good job. Zeichner (2010) believes there are a few reasons mentors are not able to do the best job possible for teacher candidates: mentor teachers are often not supported in how they can help improve teacher candidates' experiences and their compensation is below minimum wage for the work they do. In addition, it can be difficult to find placements at all let alone quality ones (Knight, Turner, & Dekkers, 2013). It is evident that mentors are not properly valued in their role and this issue needs to be addressed in teacher education. Increased communication about teacher candidate courses and expectations are key to successful practicums.

It is vitally important that mentor teachers are made fully aware of the expectations of the practicum (Tillema et al., 2011). Some participants spoke about new mentors who were unaware of expectations for teacher candidates. Other mentors assumed each program was the same and expected a second year teacher candidate to teach what a fifth year candidate would. It is evident some mentors do not understand what is expected of teacher candidates.

University Connection with District School Boards

Darling-Hammond (2006a) believes it is important for teacher education programs to have connection with local schools. The university connection with district school boards was not found to be statistically significant between the two programs, although it was fairly close ($p = .067$). The arrangement of the practicum is quite different between the two programs. At the FIPP, students are given an opportunity to pick their top three district school boards for practicum placements, and practicum supervisors place students in one of their chosen school boards for each year of the program. Students are discouraged from doing their placements in the university's local school board unless it is in their hometown. Alternatively, the MIPP places students locally for their practicum and allows the option for placement in their preferred district for their final teaching block only. Allowing students the opportunity to have all of their placements in boards where they want to teach gives teacher candidates the opportunity to make meaningful connections in schools and communities where they are interested in working. Students at the FIPP spoke about teachers and principals requesting teacher candidates from their program because of the good reputation and amount of practicum experience offered at this program.

While participants did not say much regarding the relationship between their university and district school boards, there is potential for improvement within concurrent education programs through strengthened connections. Chesley and Jordan (2012) argue that teacher education programs should partner with schools and educators who will uphold specific standards for practicum placements. This will ensure that mentor teachers are aligned with the teacher education program and have a thorough understanding of the practicum expectations.

Strengthening the connections between schools and teacher education programs is central to improving teacher education (Knight et al., 2013). Increasing the connections with schools can help close the theory-practice divide. One of the persistent problems with teacher education is that the programs do not reflect what real teaching is like (Clandinin et al., 2009). Increasing connections with schools can help minimize the theory-practice divide simply by including real classrooms into the program. When connections with district school boards are strengthened, the program has more opportunity to link course work with real classrooms, thereby linking theory with practice.

Increasing the time teacher candidates spend in practicum allows the opportunity to be part of the school community, creating better connections with administration and staff, and giving teacher candidates more opportunities to be involved in the school. Some students at the FIPP were able to return to the same school in different grades, giving them the ability to get involved with the school community while still experiencing a variety of ages and grades within their qualification level. This program

allowed students to be in a board of their choosing, while allowing them to work and network with the school community over the 5-year program.

The MIPP only allows students to be a part of school boards outside the university area in the final few weeks of the last teaching block. Teacher candidates are not given adequate time to make connections with their preferred school board if it is outside the university area. Participants also spoke about the lack of connection they felt to the school communities because of the minimal practicum opportunities. When teacher candidates are given many opportunities to be in schools, their chances of connecting with schools increased and their opportunity for involvement in extracurricular increased. Linking teacher education with district school boards allowed for increased practicum, theory-practice connection, and teacher candidate involvement in school communities and networking in boards.

Reflection

Effective teaching is linked to reflection and helps bridge the gap between theory and practice (Blak Hourani, 2013). Students from both programs agreed that reflection is a valuable aspect of their practicum experience, supporting the importance of reflective practice for teacher candidates. When thinking is challenged, it forces teacher candidates to evaluate their beliefs surrounding education, creating ever-evolving, thoughtful future educators (Ussher, 2010). Teacher education needs to prepare teachers to see teaching as an ongoing learning process and help teacher candidates internalize their reflective process to become life long learners (Zeichner, 1992).

Although reflection is often thought of in an individual sense, the findings of the interviews showed many of the participants valued the chance to be able to learn from

others and have meaningful discussions with peers about their practicum experiences. Reflecting as a group allows individuals to think with others, develop their own beliefs, and solidify personal beliefs (Zeichner, 1992). Chesley and Jordan (2012) think that teacher education should require teacher candidates to form a professional learning community to reflect on their experiences as a group. This highlights the need for time and space for teacher candidates to be able to talk with their classmates about their individual and shared experiences. Chamoso et al. (2012) believes that reflection helps make sense of teaching. Allowing students to reflect as a group provides more opportunity to learn from experiences. Opportunities for students to reflect should be provided so teacher candidates can learn from their experiences in the classroom and their peers' experiences to help expose teacher candidates to a larger variety of placements. By increasing the professional learning community, there are more opportunities for interactions and improved perceptions about learning to teach (Ussher, 2010).

It is important to make space for deep conversations about teaching within teacher education (Ure, 2010). Reflection also applies to mentor teachers. Many participants in the interviews talked about the importance of meaningful discussions with mentor teachers. These discussion included goal setting, constructive feedback, and even collaboration on lesson planning. Seventy percent of participants in Smith and Lev-Ari's (2005) study found that feedback sessions with mentors were the most useful processing tool for reflection. It is vitally important that mentor teachers and teacher education professors make tools for reflection available and encourage reflective practice throughout their programs. Blaik Hourani (2013) believes that it is important to have

mentor teachers who not only model reflection but also encourage teacher candidates' reflection through different avenues such as journals and small group discussions.

Teacher educators and mentors need to be willing to ask the tough questions about teaching and have teacher candidates think deeply about their teaching (Zeichner, 1992).

Teacher candidates who were allowed time and space to have discussions about their practicum believed they had richer learning experiences.

It is important to remember reflection can come in many different forms. Students already saw the value in individual reflection, but by opening up the definition of reflection to include meaningful discussions with both peers and mentors about practicum, there is an increased opportunity to reflect and learn from a variety of experiences.

Time/Preparedness

How time is utilized throughout the 5-year concurrent program has significant impact on student perception of program effectiveness. Research has shown the importance of time for the development of teachers (Hattingh & de Kock, 2008), and the data reflected that. Right from the beginning of the data collection, it was evident students at the MIPP were unsatisfied with the amount of time they spent in practicum. Generally, students were not given a chance to teach a classroom for academic credit until their final year of the program, which felt similar to a traditional consecutive program. The common perspective was the program underutilized real classroom settings and students would have benefited from the chance to be in the classrooms to help enhance their learning from other classes. The opportunity to have practicum in the first 4 years of the program would have allowed students to (a) try out lesson plans on real

classes, (b) help develop a sense of community with schools, (c) connect with mentor teachers and principals, (d) gain experience with classroom management, and (e) give them the chance to connect theory with practice. Grossman and Loeb (2008) even believe that most of what a new teacher needs to know can be learned in the practicum and the role of the university in the process can be minimized without much loss. More time in the classroom results in more satisfied, better prepared, and effective teachers who are more likely to stay in the profession over time (Darling-Hammond, 2000). It was evident from both survey and interview data that teacher candidates want to spend time in the classroom, and when they are not given that opportunity, they feel like they are missing out on valuable learning experiences. Two of the interview participants at the MIPP sought out volunteer opportunities in addition to their concurrent program in order to be connected to classrooms, which their program was not providing.

When students are enrolled in a concurrent program, it seems only natural to assume the time spent in that program would provide practicum experience throughout. Students at the MIPP felt they were misled to believe that the programs in which they were enrolled would allow for a substantial amount of time in the classroom and many realized early in their program that this was not the case. It is evident that more needs to be done to better prepare teachers for the demands of the teaching profession (Ure, 2010).

Students interviewed at the MIPP all spoke about their experience in the program with a placement that spanned the majority of their second year. They all saw this placement as a valuable experience to be a part of the school community and connect with a classroom over an extended period of time. The only problem was this placement was observation-based and allowed for no formal teaching unless the mentor teacher

suggested it to the teacher candidate. There were no expectations of lesson planning or instruction within this placement, and many saw it as an opportunity to observe a classroom and assist a teacher with photocopying and small group work. Although observation placements are very valuable to teacher education, the opportunity to practice teach is often where the most learning occurs.

The balance between observation and practicum teaching is an important aspect of teacher education. Teacher candidates need time to observe a classroom before being able to effectively instruct a classroom. Chesley and Jordan (2012) believe that observation with a purpose is a valuable tool for teacher education. Both programs had participants who identified observation as an important tool in being able to address individual student needs within the practicum. Observation also allows teacher candidates to learn from experts in action (Darling-Hammond, 2006b). Programs with “observation only” practicums do not allow teacher candidates to practice their teaching, while practicum placements with minimal observation force teacher candidates to teach in a classroom where they are unfamiliar with the routines and individual student needs. Both observation and practice teaching are important (Chesley & Jordan, 2012) and finding balance between the right amounts of the two is critical for successful practicum placements. Danyluk, Buley, and van der Giessen (2009) responded to feedback from Laurentian University’s first group of concurrent students by reducing their teaching requirement from 25% of the day to 12% of the day to allow for increased observation. By reducing the required teaching time, teacher candidates felt less pressure and received more time to observe and assist their mentor teachers. Allowing teacher candidates the

time to get to know the classroom and students will help prepare them for a successful practicum.

It is also essential to note that researchers such as Knight et al. (2013) believe that quality is more important than quantity when it comes to practicum placements. With increased time in the classroom can come added costs, such as supervisors and compensation to mentors, and simply increasing practicum time does not ensure a better program.

It is imperative to have placements throughout the 5 years as well as the opportunity for longer placements. Many students from the FIPP believed that although they thought 1-week practicums twice a year were great learning experiences, extended blocks where they were able to experience the true role of the teacher were more beneficial. Darling-Hammond (2006b) supports the idea that short placements are not ideal. Some students thought the solution was bringing the week blocks together for one 2-week block, while others like the opportunity to come into the classroom at different times of the year. The opportunity to teach is invaluable within teacher education; however, the time to connect with the classroom in a meaningful way is typically not possible in 1-week placements. Allowing students the opportunity for larger blocks can help enrich the learning experience for both teacher candidates and their students.

Context of the Practicum

The context of the practicum between the two teacher education programs was found to have a statistically significant difference. Three different themes surfaced around the context of the practicum that helped uncover what was working and what was

not for students at both universities, such as variety of practicum, lesson planning, and accountability.

Many students spoke about the importance of variety in their placement. Boz and Boz (2006) believe it is beneficial to allow students to view a variety of classroom experiences. Students at both universities thought that a variety of grades, demographics, and locations of practicum placements are important. Giving teacher candidates the chance to experience many different types of classrooms will help prepare them for the real world of teaching. If teacher candidates are only allowed to practice teach in one grade in one demographic in one area of town, they may be unable to experience a large diversity of students. Clandinin et al. (2009) believe that teacher education needs to respond to the diversity of classrooms that are constantly changing. Through ongoing placements in a variety of schools, teacher candidates can experience many different classrooms throughout their education. The benefit of having more practicums throughout the program is more opportunity for teacher candidates to experience a variety of classrooms. Two participants from the FIPP were placed in almost every grade of their qualification level. Unfortunately, one of the participants described herself as being unlucky because she had had almost exclusively Grade 4 placements throughout the program. Even if there is increased practicum experience, there is no guarantee that variety will be possible. Both programs promise that teacher candidate will have at least one placement in each of their qualification levels (i.e., if you are J/I, you will have one placement from Grades 4-6 and one from Grades 7-10). Some participants wished they had more variety and believed this should be a requirement of the program. With concurrent education programs spanning 5 years, it should be mandatory that all teacher

candidates have experiences in a variety of grades and boards, enriching their potential learning experiences.

It is important to point out that placements are often hard to come by, and administrators within teacher education programs do not have huge flexibility in their choice of where teacher candidates will go. Zeichner (1992) believes that the placements should shift from being solely based on convenience and equal share. He thinks that the context of the practicum should be teacher candidates teaching in the whole school instead of just one classroom, in schools that reflect the teacher education program. This could have implications for the criteria of placements and the number of placements available. Perhaps fewer teacher candidates admitted into teacher education could allow for better placement context.

Lesson plans were discussed many times during this research and are huge contributors to the context of the practicum. With many students spending hours every day planning lessons and organizing teaching binders, this is an integral aspect of the practicum placement. Students at both programs believed the lesson plan template was repetitive. The time and energy used to plan lessons could possibly be redirected to more useful and practical. Chesley and Jordan (2012) believe lesson plans are often artificial and contrived, showing the need for more authentic lesson planning in teacher education. It is difficult to be motivated to produce a lesson plan when mentor teachers often do not model this type of planning and even tell teacher candidates that it is a formality of teacher education. Participants at the MIPP mentioned most lesson plans were created for hypothetical classrooms during their program and were unrealistic and unusable. Darling-Hammond (2006b) knows the importance of planning for a real classroom because she

believes that teacher candidates cannot imagine what a classroom is like; they have to experience it for themselves. A clear benefit of the concurrent program is that teacher candidates have ample time and familiarity with lesson planning although perhaps more realistic planning could be used during the practicum to allow for better lessons, not better lesson plans.

An important part of the practicum that was not anticipated early on in the research was accountability. Many students felt feedback was very important to their success as educators. Both programs had a perceived lack of accountability surrounding the practicum from the evaluation of binders to the formal evaluations of lessons and even assessment throughout the practicum. In many teacher education programs, during the 5 weeks of practicum placements, teacher candidates are visited only once by teacher educators for evaluation (Hegender, 2010). Assessment is influenced by teacher educator visits and may not produce the most representative sample for final evaluation. Many students wondered if producing quality educators is the goal of teacher education, why are students moving through teacher education no matter how they perform in their practicum? Many participants believed the evaluation of the practicum is contrived and ineffective. Tillema et al. (2011) found teacher candidates and mentors believe there are problems with clear guidelines, grading rules, and what specifically is to be evaluated in the practicum. If teacher candidates and mentors are unclear of what is expected in the practicum, how can there be effective evaluation and proper accountability overall? In order to ensure that individuals who are graduating from teacher education programs have earned the right to teach, there needs to be a clear understanding of what teacher

candidates are expected to do throughout the practicum, and that needs to be properly communicated to mentor teachers and teacher candidates.

Theory-Practice Divide

There is a general understanding that teacher education needs to better connect practical experience with academic content (Ure, 2010). Through this research, it was found there was a highly significant difference between the MIPPs and FIPPs regarding the theory-practice divide. This is to be expected because the lack of practicum in the MIPP makes it difficult for the theory learned in the program to be meaningfully connected to practicum. The practical aspect of theory-practice divide equates to the practicum within teacher education, where teacher candidates have an opportunity to put their theory to practical use in real classroom settings. It was mentioned frequently that having ongoing practicum would have enriched teacher candidate learning because they would have had the opportunity to reflect, compare, connect, and apply what is being learned in teacher education to the classroom. Darling-Hammond (2006a) believes better understanding occurs in teacher education when coursework and fieldwork are taken concurrently.

Another important issue that did not arise from this research is that many students are trying to apply what they have learned in university but it does not fit with their mentor teacher's classrooms (Zeichner, 1992). Teacher candidates may have the best intentions to make connections from theory-based courses into their practicums but are not given the space or support. The context of the practicum is decided mostly by the mentor often with little connection made to coursework (Zeichner, 2010). This shows the interconnected nature of this research because the mentor teacher has so much influence

on the practicum and can be a catalyst to making connections between theory and practice or equally prevent teacher candidates from that opportunity. Zeichner (2010) believes that it is imperative to ground theory into the practice of teaching with mentors in schools that value practicum and reform in the classroom.

The divide between theory and practice will only begin to close when the practicum is valued and fully integrated into concurrent teacher education. The practicum itself should promote the integration of theory and practice (Schultz, 2005). Teacher candidates deserve the chance to experience real classrooms throughout their education in order to connect what they have learned in their education courses to what they see in the classroom. They need to have space for meaningful observation as well as practice teaching throughout the program so they can reflect individually and with peers, mentors, and teacher educators about their experiences and how these connect with educational theories. Teacher candidates will then be able to build a solid teaching philosophy based on experience and grounded in educational theory.

It is imperative that teacher education programs have practical application as well. The participants from the FIPP spoke about how their program was very practical. Students were allowed to share resources, reflect on their experiences, and go into the classroom at least twice every year to practice what they have learned in their concurrent program. On the other hand, the MIPP was described as idealistic and unrealistic, where students were often set up to believe the perfect lesson plan would always yield positive results.

One of the key elements to connecting theory and practice is the teacher educators within each program. These educators impart their knowledge of teaching onto teacher

candidates and help set the foundation for their individual teaching philosophy.

Interviewees described the importance of teacher educators and their impact on their overall experience within their program. Schultz (2005) thinks that investing in professional development to keep teacher educators current is a valuable investment in teacher education. It is important to have exceptional teacher educators so that teacher candidates can have expert models of what exceptional teachers are like as well as supportive and invested educators who want to help their students be the best teachers they can be.

Additional Findings

It was evident from the survey and interview data that there needs to be practicum all 5 years in the MIPP. The findings of this study support Smith and Lev-Ari's (2005) conclusions that teaching is best learned by actually teaching! Additional questions confirmed students at the FIPP believed practicum is at the heart of the program. They also felt more respected as educators, felt more confident about their profession choice, and believed their program has the right amount of practicum experience. Clearly, practicum experience is important for a variety of reasons. Teacher candidates want to ensure that teaching is the right profession for them and more experience will help them understand the role of teacher. More time in the classroom allows the opportunity to connect with their placement school and become a member of the school community.

Students at the MIPP also thought there needs to be improvement in their program; FIPP students, on the other hand, were generally satisfied with their teacher education program. Less "observation only" practicums, and better teacher educators were the most mentioned suggestions for improvement at MIPP. Again, practicum

throughout the 5 years is very important for optimal concurrent teacher education as well as a balance between observation and practicum teaching. Students also believed that exceptional teacher educators would help bridge the theory-practice divide.

Implications

The implications of these research findings for concurrent teacher education are discussed next. These include how concurrent teacher education can be improved and implications for future research.

Implications for Concurrent Teacher Education

In this study, research findings indicated a desire for situated practicum placements in every year of the program. It would be most beneficial for a gradual increase of time and responsibility over the 5 years, such as the first year of the program having 1 week of practicum, year two having 2 weeks of practicum, year three having 3 weeks of practicum, year four having 4 weeks of practicum, and year five having at least 11 weeks of practicum placements. This would allow teacher candidates to experience both teaching and observation in each placement with gradual release of responsibility in each new classroom.

Having practicum each year of the program would allow for more placement variety in terms of grades, ability levels, and demographics. Students should experience placements in both of their qualification levels throughout the program at different schools, preferably in their choice of school board. Like the FIPP, students should be able to select their top three school boards of choice for placement in order to gain experience in boards in which they hope to teach. This would allow for connections to be made in places that will benefit teacher candidates the most. Students should also be encouraged

to get involved in their schools' community during their placements to experience more than just the classroom.

Lesson plans should be reevaluated to be less repetitious and more realistic. Areas such as differentiated instruction and assessment should be recorded once and the length of the document should be streamlined in order to make it more practical for new teachers. An electronic version of the lesson plan should be allowed for evaluation as individuals move further away from print and more towards digital mediums. Teacher candidates should be encouraged to share their resources with peers, which will help increase learning communities and gain experience from others.

Allowing for both individual and peer discussion is also important where teacher candidates can reflect on their teaching experiences. Teacher candidates can learn from each other, making reflection a group activity from which all can benefit.

Mentor teachers should only be expert teachers! Teacher education programs need to seek out exceptional teachers through incentives, such as money or discounted Additional Qualification courses, and through sharing the important role of the mentor teacher. Mentor teachers are vital to the success of the practicum and all teacher candidates deserve to learn from great teachers in action. If a teacher is new to mentoring, he or she should be referred to the program as an exceptional teacher. If a mentor does not fulfill his or her role, he or she should not be allowed to mentor with that program again.

First time mentors need to understand the expectations for the practicum. These expectations need to be clearly communicated to new mentors either through training or

required readings. It is only fair to send teacher candidates into classrooms where everyone understands the expectations and evaluations are made objectively.

Practicum placements need accountability. Only successful teacher candidates should pass their practicum, and those who are not successful should have to repeat the practicum. Evaluation of the practicum needs to be clear to mentors and teacher candidates. There must be ongoing feedback from the mentor teacher as well as clear expectations for the teaching binder and lesson evaluation.

Implications for Further Research

This study supports the long-standing belief that more should be done to improve teacher education. Despite years of research on traditional consecutive teacher education programs, there is still a significant gap in research regarding concurrent teacher education. MIPP Students indicated that changes need to be made to optimize their time in the program and they were vocal about the various improvements that should be made. In light of these findings, it is important for teacher education programs to integrate practicum placement over the 5 years of the concurrent program. Research has shown the positive aspects of integrating practicum placement throughout the teacher-training program, and continued research on this topic will help create cohesive programs that connect the classroom to the university. Studies on concurrent education should continue to be published in order to provide additional ideas for other teacher education programs. Therefore, it is important for researchers to study all aspects of concurrent education in addition to practicum placement. Research needs to be completed on the successes and failures that teacher educators and program coordinators face when trying to enact change in order to improve their teacher education programs. Studies that look into teacher

educators and coordinators about their experiences would provide valuable insight and assist university administrators in making positive changes to their teacher education programs by looking at the possible hardships that teacher educators face.

Final Words

Teacher education is ever evolving, and through continued research on its effectiveness, improvements will be made. The purpose of this study was to examine two different concurrent teacher education programs to uncover how they utilized practicum placement and how teacher candidates within those programs perceived their effectiveness. Secondly, this study focused on understanding how concurrent teacher education can be improved to best prepare teacher candidates to teach in Ontario.

The research findings suggest practicum placements are one of the most influential aspects of teacher education, and the more opportunity there is for these placements, the more satisfied individuals are within the program. The FIPP perceived the context of their practicum was successful and the connection between theory and practice was stronger than the program with minimal integration of practicum. The more practicum, the less students thought their program needed to be improved.

On a personal level, I undertook this research because I was unsatisfied with my own concurrent teacher education experience. I believed my program was missing time in the classroom, which impacted all aspects of my teacher education. I was curious to see how other teacher candidates felt about their experiences and what they thought could be improved to best utilize the full time within the program. I know how important teacher education is for our society and I think that if we want better education for our students, we need to start with how we educate teachers. This study supports the notion that

teacher candidates want to be in the classroom, they want practical experience, and want to improve their craft. The best preparation we can provide teacher candidates is to allow them time to grow and learn within the classroom throughout their teacher education. It is time for teacher education to rise to the challenge of optimizing their concurrent programs by fully integrating practicum placement into their programs in a meaningful way.

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Appendix A

Questionnaire

Perception of Concurrent Education Survey

1. What is your age?

2. What is your gender?

☐ Female

☐ Male

☐ Other

3. What is your Bachelor of Education qualification level?

☐ Primary/Junior

☐ Junior/Intermediate

☐ Intermediate/Senior

☐ Other (please specify)

***4. What University are you enrolled in?**

☐ Brock University

☐ Nipissing University

☐ University of Ontario Institute of Technology

5. For the purpose of this research, practicum placement involves both observation and practice teaching where teacher candidates are given a chance to teach in real classrooms, plan lessons, practice assessment and evaluation, develop classroom management techniques, and learn from their assigned mentor teacher.

Did you have a practicum placement in your first year of concurrent education?

☐ Yes

☐ No

If yes, how long was your practicum (please be as specific as possible; i.e., days, weeks, months), and what percentage of the practicum consisted of teaching?

Perception of Concurrent Education Survey

6. Did you have a practicum placement in your second year of concurrent education?

☐ Yes

☐ No

If yes, how long was your practicum (please be as specific as possible; i.e., days, weeks, months), and what percentage of the practicum consisted of teaching?

7. Did you have a practicum placement in your third year of concurrent education?

☐ Yes

☐ No

If yes, how long was your practicum (please be as specific as possible; i.e., days, weeks, months), and what percentage of the practicum consisted of teaching?

8. Did you have a practicum placement in your fourth year of concurrent education?

☐ Yes

☐ No

If yes, how long was your practicum (please be as specific as possible; i.e., days, weeks, months), and what percentage of the practicum consisted of teaching?

9. Did you have a practicum placement in your fifth year of concurrent education?

☐ Yes

☐ No

If yes, how long was your practicum (please be as specific as possible; i.e., days, weeks, months), and what percentage of the practicum consisted of teaching?

10. If you have had more than one practicum, answer the following questions as they most generally apply to your practicum experiences overall.

My practicum(s) allowed me to see models of expert teachers in action.

Strongly Disagree

Disagree

Neutral

Agree

Strongly Agree

☐
☐
☐
☐
☐

Perception of Concurrent Education Survey

11. My practicum(s) allowed me to practice new teaching skills, with feedback from my mentor teacher(s).

Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree
<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

12. My mentor teacher(s) had a clear idea of what my university required me to do as part of my practicum.

Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree
<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

13. I received valuable feedback from my mentor teacher(s).

Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree
<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

14. My university teacher educators and my school-based mentor teacher(s) had similar views on good teaching methods.

Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree
<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

15. My mentor teacher(s) generally valued the ideas and approaches I brought from my university teacher education programme.

Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree
<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

16. My mentor teacher(s) used criteria/standards provided by my university for evaluating my teaching.

Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree
<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

17. My placement(s) consisted of gradual release of responsibility, where I taught when I was ready.

Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree
<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

18. I was given enough time in the classroom to experience the role of a teacher.

Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree
<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

19. I was given enough time in the classroom to feel like a part of the school community.

Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree
<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

20. There is enough balance between practice teaching and observation in my program.

Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree
<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Perception of Concurrent Education Survey

21. My program effectively utilized the time I was in the program. (i.e., the right balance of coursework and practicum[s]).

Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree
<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

22. After my practicum(s) I felt prepared to enter the teaching profession.

Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree
<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

23. My teacher education program prepared me to be an effective teacher.

Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree
<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

24. My teacher education program is strongly linked to district school boards.

Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree
<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

25. My university teacher educators and my school-based mentor teacher(s) had similar views on the value of research.

Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree
<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

26. Within my practicum(s) I was able to use technology.

Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree
<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

27. I had a clear understanding of what was expected of me as a teacher in order to be successful in my practicum(s).

Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree
<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

28. I was able to experience a variety of placements (i.e., different grades, types of placements, schools) throughout my teacher education program.

Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree
<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

29. My teacher education program is aligned with what real teaching is like.

Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree
<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Perception of Concurrent Education Survey

30. What I learned in my practicum placement(s) enriched my understanding of theories relating to education.

Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree
<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

31. My practicum(s) helped me make clear links between theoretical and practical aspects of teaching.

Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree
<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

32. There was an expectation that I practice reflection throughout my practicum(s).

Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree
<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

33. My practicum(s) allowed me to learn methods for reflecting on my teaching.

Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree
<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

34. My teacher education program allowed me to understand the benefits of reflective practice.

Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree
<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

35. Reflection in my practicum(s) helped me make sense of my teaching.

Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree
<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

36. I am a reflective practitioner.

Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree
<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

37. My practicum(s) was at the heart of the program within my teacher education (thoroughly integrated into the program, related to teaching theories, and supported by mentor teachers who model what is learned within the program).

Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree
<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

38. When in my placement(s), I felt respected as an educator.

Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree
<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

39. My teacher education program has the right amount of practicum experience.

Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree
<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Perception of Concurrent Education Survey

40. My practicum(s) helped me decide if I want to stay in the profession or not.

Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree
<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

41. My practicum experience(s) was a valuable part of my preparation to become a teacher.

Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree
<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

42. My teacher education program needs improvement.

Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree
<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

What could be improved?

43. Please rank the following components from 1 to 6 (1 being the most influential and 6 being the least influential) in terms of their influence on your practicum experience(s).

<input type="text"/>	Mentor teacher
<input type="text"/>	Connection between your university and district/school boards
<input type="text"/>	Program time
<input type="text"/>	Reflective practice
<input type="text"/>	Context of the practicum (How the practicum fit into the overall program, practicum organization)
<input type="text"/>	Connection between theory and practice

44. If you would like to be a part of the focus group please provide your name and email below.

<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>
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Appendix B

Interview Protocol

Opening Script

Thank you for taking the time to be a part of my research on concurrent education.

Before we start with the focus group/interview I would like to remind you that you may withdraw from the study at any point and you do not have to answer each question posed. Please try to avoid using names of peers, teacher educators, or mentor teachers to ensure their privacy. Also confidentiality cannot be assured in a group setting so please respect the privacy of others and not disclose conversation details outside of the group.

Before we start please say your name, the program qualification level you are in and teachables if you have them.

First I want to talk about what influenced you during your teacher education (i.e. mentor teachers, practicum, theory, peers etc.)

What aspects of your practicum were most beneficial or provided you with the most growth?

Were you placed with quality mentors?

Did your mentor teachers understand what the university expects for the practicum?

Did your mentor reflect your teacher education program?

Was practicum at the heart of your program?

How did your program utilize your time throughout the 5 years?

Were you able to teach when you were ready?

Did you have enough time in the classroom?

Did you experience a balance between observation and practicum/practice teaching?

Did you get to experience a variety of placements (demographics, ages, grades, boards, locations etc.)?

Is your program and practicum aligned with what real teaching?

Did your practicum help you link theory and practice?

Do you feel prepared to enter the teaching profession?

What aspects of practicum need improvement?

Do you feel you have an advantage over consecutive students going through a concurrent program?

Would you recommend your program to someone considering entering concurrent education?